

starwind

science fiction and fantasy

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An Interview with
JOE HALDEMAN

EDMOND HAMILTON
Birthplace of Creation

H.H. HOLLIS
The Widow Figler

LARRY BLANKENSHIP
Zingad the Roof-Squatter ✧





Cover art by Georgia Mase, design by Elbert Lindsey, suggested by Edmond Hamilton's "Birthplace of Creation".

Back cover art by Brad Black.

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conducted by Elbert Lindsey

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The award-winning author of **THE FOREVER WAR** discusses everything from 61 Cygni A to groundhogs.

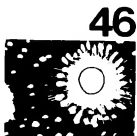


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SURVIVAL

Lee Killough

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editorial

Elbert Lindsey, Jr.



As the new Editor of STARWIND I have taken upon myself albatrossian burdens and frustrations, if I can trust the analysis of the former Editor. However, he and I view the operation of the organization differently.

The Starwind Press is a student organization at The Ohio State University, and the reason for its existence is to provide a creative outlet for members of the University community. The only restriction on this creativity, that the published material be science fiction or fantasy, is, to me, a restriction imposing few limitations. In science fiction, an author is limited only by his imagination and the laws of logic. In fantasy, even logic can be restructured to fit the author's desires.

Besides offering a creative outlet for authors, the organization strives to provide the chance for students, faculty, staff, and others to become involved in the production of a magazine. From ad soliciting to editing, to designing, to marketing; all phases of the process are an opportunity to learn and to create.

And because publishing STARWIND is a group effort, one must deal with other people. For the magazine to appear regularly, and on schedule, and to meet the standards of quality The Starwind Press has set for it, all staff members must work well together. We think we have, and we are proud of what we have done.

We would like your opinion.

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Special thanks, once again, to Mr. James Trainer.

Thanks to Dawn Lamp, Joanne Mase, and John Mase for their help in proofreading the final galleys.



ZINGAD THE ROOF-SQUATTER

Larry Blankenship

The young man eased the grey Ford pick-up around the corner, downshifting, letting the truck coast, whining, between the rows of ancient two-story houses. He glanced at the clipboard on the seat beside him. 2735 Marquis St. His eyes roamed over the blistered housefronts as he passed, searching.

Near the end of the block, two small boys with plastic rifles chased each other in circles around a dead elm tree. The young man let his foot rest lightly on the brake, reading the rusty tin numerals tacked to the tree trunk. 2734. He looked again at the clipboard and pulled to the curb opposite the tree.

The house he sought was much like any other on the street: tall; Victorian; dingy yellow paint crazed and peeling; wide sagging porch. The address was painted on the top porch step in tiny, lopsided figures. 2735. The young man looked at the number, up to the roof, then back to the number. He shrugged, opened the truck door, and stepped into the street.

"Bang! Bang!"

"Pow-pow!"

"Ka-pow!"

The young man lurched drunkenly, slumping against the side of the truck, both hands clutching at his heart. The two boys retreated, firing off another volley as they disappeared into their back yard. The young man smiled and fished in his pants pocket. Producing a ring of keys, he unlocked the chains that held his ladders in place on the truck rack.

"Ahoy!"

The voice came from the direction of the yellow house. The young man peered under the ladder rack to see a paunchy, grey-haired man hobbling down the steps toward him. The man was clad only in a pair of green-and-brown plaid bermudas. From the waist up, his skin was pale, the color of buttermilk; his legs were sunburned a livid pink.

The man squinted at the lettering on the side of the truck. "Mr. Crown! I'm Bill Kreutz." He walked around the back of the pick-up and extended his hand.

"Charlie Zingad," the young man grasped the hand, shaking it slightly. "Crown is just the name of my company. Crown Maintenance. I've . . ."

"Come to look at my roof."

Charlie nodded.

"There is nothing quite as beautiful as fully developed potential. Don't you agree?"

"Well, there it is," Kreutz swept a hand in the direction of the house. "No use looking at it. I want it completely re-roofed."

"Oh. I didn't notice any damage from down here."

"There's no damage," Kreutz smiled.

"Well," Charlie nodded again. "I'll measure it and give you an estimate."

"No need to estimate. Whatever it costs, I'll pay. You look like a young man I can trust."

Charlie chewed at his lower lip. "I'll have to know how much material . . ."

"Very well. Suit yourself," Kreutz raised one eyebrow. "I didn't mean to make you nervous."

"Suit yourself," Kreutz turned and walked away. Halfway across the yard, he paused. "It takes twenty-three and two-thirds squares, counting the porches. See if you can get mauve, or something close." He waved and turned back toward the house.

Charlie watched until Kreutz had gone inside, then hauled his ladder off the rack and carried it across the yard.

"No. It isn't raining."

"Doesn't it look like rain?" The voice at the other end of the line wavered on the edge of a chuckle. "Weather man calls for rain."

"It's not raining. It hasn't been raining. It's not going to rain. I have to work today."

"Take the day off anyway."

"I can't."

The voice sighed. "You're too damned dependable, Charlie. You're going to dependable yourself right into an early grave."

"Be serious, will you, Uncle Highball? I'll tell you what. . ."

"What?"

"First time I get rained out, I'll drive up and we'll go fishing."

"I think I've heard that song before."

"Aw, come on! I have a business to run. I have to work for a living."

"Are you implying that I don't?"

"No. That's different."



"Okay. You win again. But the next time it rains down there, you'd better show up. I'll have my gear ready."

"Your gear is always ready."

"Let's not quibble over an iota. Good-bye."

The line went dead. Charlie sat for a few moments listening to the dial tone, then hung up the phone. He looked at the clock hanging over the refrigerator. The clock said 4:32. The sky was beginning to lighten in the east.

Charlie sighed and began to pack his lunch.

"You're here bright and early this morning."

Charlie let the ladder come to rest against the eave and turned to see Bill Kreutz standing a few feet behind him. Kreutz was wearing a burgundy crushed-velvet smoking jacket. His hands were thrust deep into his pockets.

"I got up kind of early. Telephone woke me."

"Nothing tragic, I hope."

"No. It was just my uncle up in Chesterton. He wanted me to go fishing."

"Mmm," Kreutz nodded thoughtfully, "I'm glad you didn't go." There was silence for a moment. "Your shingles were delivered yesterday afternoon."

"I know."

More silence.

"It must be exciting, being a roofer, balancing up there on that steep roof where one wrong move could be your last. You must be very agile." Kreutz gazed dreamily at the tip of the ladder protruding above the gutters. "Don't you have a helper?"

"No. I'd just as soon work alone."

"Good, good . . . Do you read much?"

"Huh?"

"I was asking if you read very much," Kreutz lowered his eyes to Charlie's face. "I'm an avid reader myself. I have over thirty subscriptions. Are you familiar with Marvel?"

"Marvel?"

"Yes. Spiderman, Iron Man, the Incredible Hulk . . ."

"Those are funny books, aren't they?"

"I prefer to call them graphic fiction, but, yes, I suppose you're right. There are a number of publishers, of course, but Marvel is one of the largest." Kreutz looked thoughtful. "But, then again, D.C. would probably be the most instructive. Especially Batman. Now there is an example of developed potential. There is nothing quite as beautiful as fully developed potential. Don't you agree?"

"I suppose."

"Especially potential such as yours, Mr. Zingad."

Charlie's eyes narrowed. "Potential for what?"

"Don't be nervous."

"I'm not nervous."

"Yes."

"Potential for what?"

"Potential to excel," Kreutz pointed a finger at the blank morning sky. "With proper development, we could all excel, providing we started early enough. But all that can wait. With a little study, I'm sure you'll see my point. Why don't you let me loan you some reading material?"

"Well, I don't have much time . . ."

"No hurry," Kreutz smiled benevolently, "I'll pick out some things for you, a broad spectrum to begin with. You can return them anytime. I'm sure I'll be seeing more of you in the future."

"I'll be around for a few days, I guess."

"Wonderful! I'll go select a few things right now."

Kreutz went back into the house, leaving Charlie feeling slightly bewildered, a feeling that stayed with him through

the remainder of the day. He expected to see Kreutz again, but the day passed without a glimpse of him.

At four o'clock, an hour before his usual quitting time, Charlie packed up his tools, loaded up his ladder, and climbed into the cab of his truck. He shot a wary glance at the house. There was no sign of Kreutz.

Charlie sighed and lit a cigarette, watching the pale smoke curl out the window and fade into the open air. He was just about to smile a smile of relief when, out of the corner of his eye, he caught a hint of motion. The front door of the house was swinging open. Charlie jerked upright, jammed the key into the ignition, and twisted.

The engine convulsed and died. Kreutz was striding quickly across the yard, a bundle of magazines tucked under his arm. Charlie's eyes moved frantically over the instrument panel, fastening on the choke knob. The knob had been pulled all the way out. Charlie shoved it back into position, pushed the gas peddle to the floor, and ground the starter. The truck strained, sputtered, and died again as the passenger door opened and a stack of comic books flopped onto the seat.

"You almost forgot your books." Kreutz winked and grinned.

"Oh."

"See you tomorrow!"

Charlie forced a smile. "Yeah."

Kreutz slammed the door and stepped back. He stood on the sidewalk while Charlie got his truck started and pulled away. Charlie made a left turn at the first side-street, looking behind him to where Kreutz still stood.

"Tomorrow, I go fishing."

"You should get up here more often, Charlie. You could use the relaxation."

Charlie crossed his legs, letting his head rest against the trunk of the elderly gnarled oak. In front of him, just inside

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the tree's shadow, two lines sagged into the pond's brownish water. Charlie closed his eyes. "I'd like to, but you know how it is."

"I know." Uncle Highball took a long, gulping drink from his bottle of root beer. "What's bothering you?"

"I didn't say . . ."

"Look, Charlie. I know you pretty well. Now, it's not raining in the city. This is not your slack season. I talked to you yesterday and you couldn't spare a day off work. Today you show up here with all your gear and two six-packs of root beer. It doesn't take Scotland Yard to figure out why you came."

"Alright." Charlie drew a deep breath. "I'm doing a roof for a guy named Kreutz and . . . well, he gives me the heebies."

"You're okay as long as he doesn't give you the jeebies."

"Ha-ha, very funny. You don't have to work for the man."

"Do you?"

"No. I could let them repossess my truck and my tools and my house and . . ."

"Heaven forbid that your credit rating should suffer!"

"It's all really funny, isn't it? Maybe I could laugh too, if I were you."

"Maybe." Uncle Highball took another swig of root beer.

"What exactly is your problem with Kraut?"

"Kreutz."

"Kreutz. Tell me about him."

Charlie recounted his conversations with Kreutz.

"So what?"

"Don't you think he sounds a little . . ." Charlie looked around, lowering his voice, "strange?"

"You mean you think he's a faggot?"

"Not necessarily, but . . ." Charlie shrugged.

"But what?"

"But *what*? Would you like to work for somebody like him?"

"I wouldn't like to work for anybody. If I had to hold down a job, though, I wouldn't give a good damn who I worked for."

"You can say that. You're a writer. You don't have to put up with these weirdos."

Uncle Highball groaned. "Let's change the subject."

"What should I do?"

"About Kraut?"

"Kreutz."

"Don't ask me. I'm not your guru. Besides, I don't even see your problem."

"Don't see my problem? You didn't sit up half the night reading Spiderman and Green Lantern and the Incredible Crud!"

"I wouldn't have minded."

"Well, I did!"

"So why did you do it?"

Charlie frowned. "You're scaring the fish."

Uncle Highball chuckled. "Know what I think, Charlie?"

"What?"

"I think *you* are the Incredible Crud."

The next day was grey and soggy. Charlie crawled out of bed and stood by the window, watching the drizzle, cursing himself for going fishing the day before. It was going to be a long day.

Charlie drove to work. When he reached Kreutz' house, he found the man's 1963 Rambler parked in the drive. The garage was open and empty, so Charlie carried several squares of shingles in out of the rain and began cutting his starters and ridge-cap, relieved, at least, at not having to face Kreutz.

Just before noon, Kreutz appeared, "Pretzels?"

Charlie stared at him a moment. "Huh?"

"Would you like some pretzels? They're great with the root beer."

"What root beer?"

Kreutz reached into the pocket of his tan safari jacket and



produced a can of Dad's. He handed it to Charlie. "Your brand, I hope."

"Every brand is my brand."

"I know," Kreutz nodded. "Did you have a chance to read those books? You didn't work yesterday."

"I read them."

"What did you think? No . . . don't even answer that. That question is a little premature." Kreutz sat down on a bundle of shingles, staring at Charlie's feet. After a while he spoke.

"You wouldn't think it to look at me, but I have a lot of money.

Oh, I know it sounds strange, me living here, driving that old Rambler. But it's true. I have too much money."

Charlie snickered.

"I was sure there was something better in life and I went after it. I was wrong. Not about there being something better, mind you, but about what that something was."

"Don't laugh." Kreutz looked grave.

"I'm sorry. That just doesn't sound like much of a problem to me."

"It is, though. It's a terrible thing to be old and rich, wanting so much to help the world, but with all your potential gone. Mine is gone, dried up. You don't understand. I hope you never do." Kreutz scraped his heel across the concrete floor.

"Did you hear about that mail robbery last night?"

"No."

"It was ghastly. Two men robbed the U.S. Mail. Do you know where the police were?"



Charlie looked blank.

"Well?"

"Uh . . . I don't know."

"I'll tell you. They were roosting drunks. They were writing out parking tickets. They were previewing pornographic movies. They were doing everything but protecting the lives and property of the people who pay their wages."

Charlie sat the empty can on the floor.

"Do you know how many muggings there were in this city last year?"

Charlie shook his head.

"Neither do I. I stopped counting at five hundred and sixty-nine. That was in March." Kreutz looked sadly out into the rain. "By the way, what is your favorite color?"

Charlie puckered his forehead. "Blue."

"Dark blue?"

"I guess."

"Indigo?"

Charlie shrugged.

"I was hoping for black, but indigo will do." Kreutz picked up the empty can and got to his feet. "Well, I'll be talking to you again. I have a few more things I'd like you to read. Do you know who Ben Grimm is? I guess not. But you'll learn." He walked out into the rain. "I'll just go ahead and put the books in your truck, so that you don't forget them. Alright?"

"Sure."

Charlie returned to his task, working straight through his normal lunch time. It was after two o'clock when he realized he had cut more shingles than he needed.

Charlie Zingad awoke feeling tired and irritable. He had slept badly, awakening several times from vaguely upsetting dreams. The dreams involved Bill Kreutz and a cast of characters from the comic books he had read the evening before. After each dream, Charlie had drifted back to sleep, whispering prayers for a week of rain.

Charlie rose and stumbled into the kitchen, stubbing his big toe on the doorjamb. The comic books lay in a stack on the table. The cover of the top magazine featured a man in leopard-skin leotards squirting a reddish foam at a hovering leperanodon. Charlie turned the book face-down on the stack. The back cover was a full-page ad for a three-year subscription to the Silent Sandstorm. He picked up the book and turned it face-up again.

Unable to eat breakfast, Charlie loaded the comics into his truck and drove to Kreutz' house. Kreutz was waiting for him on the front steps.

"Are you going to finish up today?"

"I'm going to try." Charlie looked at the older man, "I brought back your funny . . . your magazines."

"Yes." Kreutz stared blankly down the street.

Charlie sat the comics on the bottom step and turned to go.

"Charlie?"

"Hm?"

"I'd like to talk to you. You don't mind if I call you Charlie?"

Charlie shook his head.

"Sit down, please."

Charlie sat down.

"I suppose you think I'm insane."

"I . . ."

"No need to apologize. I had hoped to make a good impression, but I know I didn't."

Charlie opened his mouth to speak, but Kreutz motioned him to silence.

"You see, I have a plan. A wild and wonderful plan. I've worked it out to the last detail. You are my last detail, Charlie."

"I mentioned my theory of potentials, if you'll recall. Did I also mention that, in my younger days, I was a roofer?"

"No."

"I was. And I hated it. I was sure there was something better in life and I went after it." He shrugged. "I was wrong. Not about there being something better, mind you, but about what that something was. By the time I realized it, it was too late. My strength was gone. So was my agility. There was no way I could ever return to the housetops. My youthful potential was wasted."

"That's when I started looking for a roofer. Not just any roofer, you understand. The roofer. I had my house reshingled by one company after another, over and over, probably a hundred times. Then you came along, Charlie. Are you sure you don't mind me calling you Charlie?"

"No . . ."

"Good. I liked you the moment I saw you. You remind me of a younger Bill Kreutz: strong, determined, fearless in your line of work. That was why I gave you the books to read, hoping you'd see what I see before it's too late."

"Too late for what?" Charlie eyed him suspiciously.

"Too late to use your God-given potential. Too many people let their potentials go, or misuse them. Look at Lex

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(BETWEEN

Luthor. There is nothing more loathesome than greatness perverted to evil."

"Wait a minute! Lex Luthor's not real! He's just a funny book character!"

"Of course he isn't real. Neither is Superman. I'll even grant you that they are impossible. So are the Human Torch and the Martian Manhunter. But look at Batman. Look at Green Arrow, or a half-dozen others. They have no super-powers. They have technology and training. They are possible! That's one of the points I'd hoped you'd see. Man may never fly, but he can leap. And leap he must if he is ever going to overcome his own evil.

"You see, I have a plan. A wild and wonderful plan. I've worked it out to the last detail. You are my last detail, Charlie. You are the man I've waited for . . ."

"Now, wait . . ."

"Hear me out! I agreed that superheroes are fiction, right? Well, Batman is a fiction, but he could be a reality. It would only take two ingredients. The first is money. I have money, more than you can imagine. I could take the right man and hone him to a cutting edge. I could hire all the greatest teachers. Judo, karate, kung fu, gymnastics, sky-diving, you name it! I could have all the right equipment built: a Batmobile, a Batcycle, all the gadgets for an honest-to-God utility belt. *All I need is the right man!*

"Imagine it! The night is dark, clouds hover about the moon. An old man totters home from his neighborhood grocery. Out of the shadows steps a man with a gun. Where are the police? They are across town, piddling with prostitutes. Is there no hope for the old man? Is he at the mercy of the robber? No! Suddenly, down from the rooftops swoops a masked man, his indigo cape fluttering on the night air like some great avenging bird! Who is this man, this champion? It is Zingad the Roof-Squatter! What do you say to that, Charlie Zingad?"

"Crazy as a bedbug!"

"I don't know," Uncle Highball propped his feet up on the raised hearth, tapping his pipe in the ashtray on the floor at his side. "he reminds me of a character in a story I once wrote. Couldn't stand imperfection. He finally took a felt marker and went around correcting the world's spelling errors. You know, like signs that say 'Do not set on display furniture' and 'Reopened under new owner'. This guy Kruetz doesn't sound like your average Mason, but, then again, I wouldn't call him insane."

"You're not his Batman candidate. You're not expected to run around rooftops all night and bushwhack the bad guys."

"You make it sound ridiculous."

"It is ridiculous!"

"Lots of things are ridiculous."

"Like what?"

"Like the way you live now. You're young, you're single, you have no responsibilities not of your own making. You spend seven days a week beating on somebody else's roof with a hammer trying to pay off a lot of debts you wouldn't even have if it weren't for the kind of work you do. That is what I call ridiculous."

"You're not in my position. . ."

"You're damned right, I'm not! But listen to this! Every time you have a runny nose, you come up here for me to help you blow it. When I do, you don't like the way I do it, so you complain that I don't know how your snot feels. If you're not going to listen to my opinions, don't ask for them."

The two sat in silence, Charlie gazing dumbly at the built-in bookshelves on the south wall of the family room.

"What would you do if you were me?"

Uncle Highball pouted. "I'm not."

"For God's sake, Uncle Highball! I need help!"

"Alright. You have asked the Oracle, now hear it speak. I am a flabby, middle-aged writer of children's stories. When I

was a child, I had an ambition. Did you?"

"Yeah, but . . ."

"What was it?"

Charlie looked embarrassed. "I wanted to be . . . the Lone Ranger."

"Every child has a dream like that. Don't be embarrassed."

"I'm not embarrassed."

"My dream was to be Highball Imperator, Ruler of All Men. I would move through life, doing all things in their season. I would labor as necessary and I would fish at will. My minions would obey me in all things, both in deed and in intent. Unfortunately, there were no Imperator's jobs open, so I became a writer."

"So?"

"Now I work when I have to; I fish when I want to; and, when I want a few minions, I write them up."

"Oh."

"I have a feeling you missed my whole point, Charlie."

"No. I got your point. You want me to trade in a normal, healthy life for a pair of indigo longjohns."

"Only if they fit."

Charlie licked his lips. "Have any root beer around?"

"Fresh out."

Charlie sighed. "Kruetz wants me to call him with my answer."

"Do you have his roof done? And your money collected?"

Charlie nodded.

"Then you can call him and say 'yes', or not call him. If he doesn't hear from you, he'll know what you've decided. If you ever decide."

"What's to decide? I told you I think he's crazy, him and his ideas."

Uncle Highball shrugged, "Then why waste my valuable time, if you're so sure?"

"I don't know," Charlie shook his head. "I don't know." He rose and walked across the room to stand by the bookshelves and stare at the rows of books. More than half of them bore the by-line of Rufus Zingad.

"Highball Imperator?" he chuckled. He turned to look at his uncle's face.

Uncle Highball nodded.

"That's really strange."

"Yes, Cimosabe."

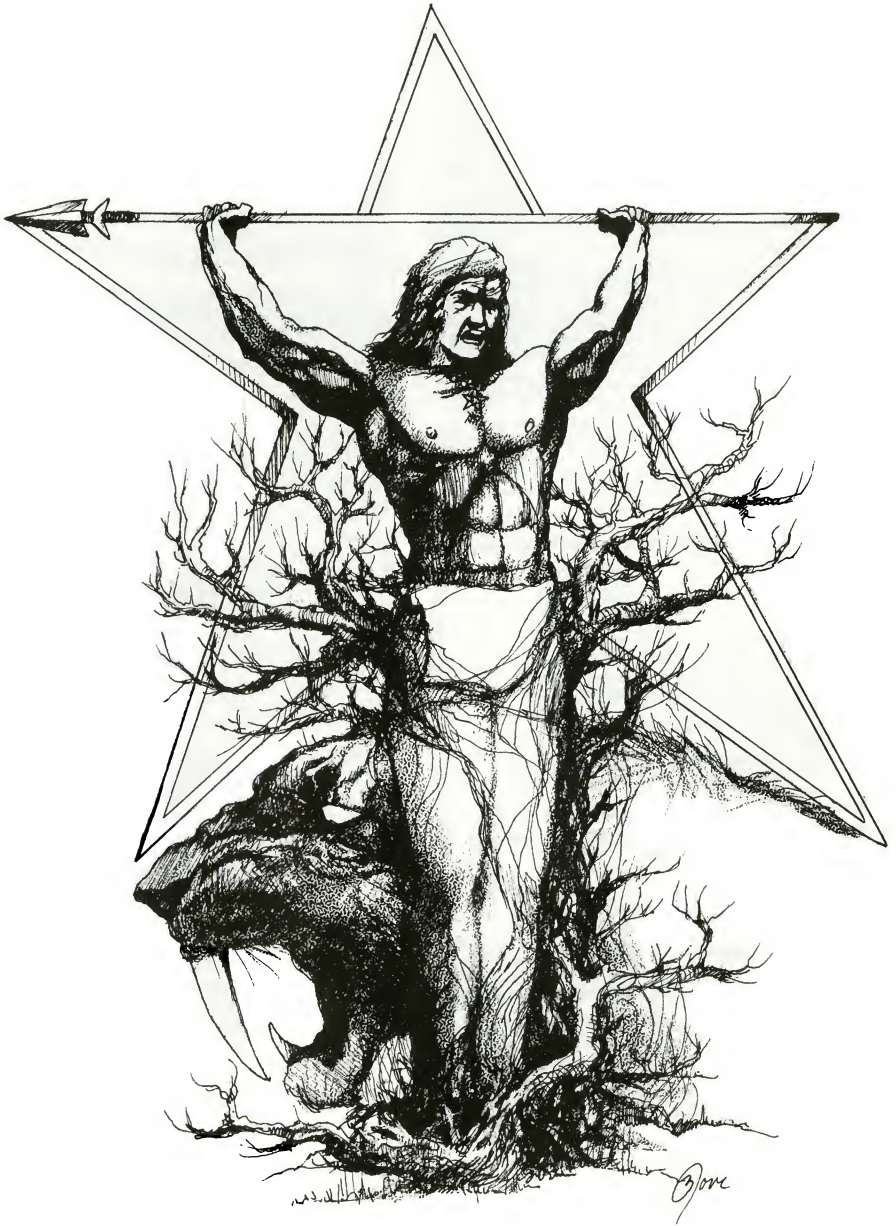
They both laughed.

"Did they call you Highball when you were a kid?"

"Did they call you Roof-squatter?"

Charlie sighed and rubbed both hands down over his face. "Roof-squatter." He started to giggle. "Roof-squatter! Oh, I give up. Let me use your telephone."





MASTER OF SHADOWS

Robert Weinberg

“There is an evil there which is beyond comprehension. Men are dying without a clue to their slayer. The entire town is in a state of panic. Only you can help us.”

Shadow Beast

The girl sat quietly in the back of the room. In the dim light of the tavern, she was hardly noticed. Her gray shawl effectively hid her blond hair and fair features from the curious stares of the nearby men. She kept to herself, her eyes rivetted on the door of the inn. Earlier in the evening, she had been told that the man she sought would make an appearance at this tavern. It was not considered proper in 18th Century England for a woman to frequent such a place, but there was not time to worry about reputations. The girl did not care what others might think. The lives of many people were in the balance.

Peg Wayne's eyes widened as the door of the inn swung open and a black haired stranger strode into the room. The man looked about the place with insolent assurance. He stood tall, six feet or so, and he was massive of shoulder and arm. He was dressed in the somber black of the Puritans, but this man was no Puritan. His face was harsh and savage. His thin, slanting cheekbones and hawk nose gave him an angular, cruel expression. His lips were thin and curved in an arrogant grin. His eyes were deep pools of blackness which seemed to whisper of some inner evil. The man wore black, for black suited him best. There was no need to notice the scabbarded sword he wore at his belt to know that this stranger was a killer. His very appearance shouted of death and destruction.

No one stood in the man's path as he made his way to an empty table. His order for ale was filled immediately. Though few seemed to know who the stranger was, all sensed that he was not a man to anger unnecessarily.

Peg rose from her chair. This *had* to be the man she sought. Swiftly, the girl made her way across the room, ignoring the coarse jokes and invitations that followed her. Such talk ceased when the speakers saw where the girl was going. Sullenly, the men turned back to their beer. Peg Wayne stood quietly in front of the dark stranger's table.

The man looked at the girl in curiosity. He obviously did not share the opinion of the others in the tavern about the woman's profession. "You want to speak to me?" he asked in a surprisingly mild voice.

"You are the man, Morgan Smith, who is called 'The Cursed of God?'"

The man nodded, smiling. "I answer to that title. I've been called worse."

Peg sat down across from the man, trembling in anticipation. "I have been looking for you for the last three weeks. I have travelled from town to town seeking information about your whereabouts."

"I'm flattered," chuckled Smith. "I'm sure, unfortunately, that you did not seek me just for my pleasant company."

"Travellers through my hometown, Druid's Oak, spoke of you. They told many tales in my father's inn, and I listened to them all. One man told of how you served Lucifer until you were commanded to perform a task which you would not. The teller said that now you battle the forces of evil in an attempt to break their hold upon your body and your soul."

Smith's face was grim. He was no longer smiling. His brow was furled so that his eyebrows seemed to merge directly over his nose, giving him a satanic majesty.

"The man spoke the truth, or at least part of it," Morgan Smith raised his right hand. On the fourth finger, he wore a heavy metal ring, inscribed with strange symbols and signs. "This ring is my link with Lucifer, Lord of the Dark Forces. It gives me power over certain supernatural forces. I cannot remove this ring. If I did so, those very powers which I control would turn upon me and destroy me. I am bound by Satan, but I will not be ruled by Him!

"It was an evil bargain. For powers which I desired, I was to serve Lucifer in all His wishes. Serve I did, until one order was given which I would not obey. There can be no disobedience to the wishes of the Dark One. From that day of refusal, I became a rebel. I fight the forces of evil for my own sake."



"Then come with me to Druid's Oak!" the girl cried in excitement, "There is an evil there which is beyond comprehension. Men are dying without a clue to their slayer. The entire town is in a state of panic. Only you can help us."

"Perhaps. Let me hear more about this evil of yours before I make my decision."

"The horror began two months ago. When I left my home three weeks back, there was no sign that it was ending. It was on a night of the full moon. The entire town was awakened by the shriekings of a man in horrible agony. Otto Crane, the blacksmith, was dead by the time the door of his house was broken down. He had died in bed, his blankets unruffled, a look of utter disbelief and shock on his face. He was the first, but he was not the last.

"Each night of the full moon, another man died. All were strong, powerful men, and each one of them died without any sign of a struggle. Then, the moon changed her face and the murders ceased. The fear lessened. Until the next month, when men again started dying. It was then that I set out alone, with my hopes of finding you and enlisting your aid. These deaths are a product of sorcery. Only sorcery can stop them."

Smith did not even appear to hear the girl's last words. His eyes were staring at something not there, his face clouded in recollection.

Shaking the cobwebs from his mind, the man nodded his head in agreement, "I will fight this evil of which you speak. From what you have just told me, I think I recognize the cause. There is dark magic here. A master of evil is preying on the inhabitants of your town.

"In the rare book, THE SEVEN PRINCES OF HELL, passing reference is made to a man known only as 'The Master of Shadows.' This Shadow Lord serves the same evil being who I once acknowledged as king. Of more importance is the fact that this man is deathless. He is a vampire, one who lives on the life forces of others. As long as he can drain the souls of strong men, the Shadow Master lives. I believe he is the one who is the source of your town's distress."

Smith rose to his feet. His black eyes were blazing. "Come, we must be off. In a few days, there will be a full moon. By then, we must have arrived in Druid's Oak." The man's right hand fell to the hilt of his sword. "We shall see how this Shadow Lord likes the taste of cold steel!"

The tavern where Peg Wayne had first heard of Morgan Smith had stood deserted for more than a year. The girl's father had died and she had gone to live with relatives on the other side of town. It was in the large front room of that building that the two made preparations for the oncoming evil.

Smith and the girl had made their way into town under the cover of falling night. The few streets were deserted, Druid's Oak lived in a grip of terror. No one was about, and Smith expressed his approval of the fact.

"No tales of my presence to reach the Shadow Master," the man concluded as he moved tables and chairs to the back of the room, "The evil which he commands will come looking for the easiest prey. I will be bait for our trap."

The room was a strange sight. All of the furniture was piled in the back. The entire front half of the tavern was bare of anything that might cast a shadow on the long windowless far wall. Smith took a lantern and covered one side so that it cast out light only one way. He placed the lamp away from the far

It was here that shadows had the power to affect material objects. In this circle, shadows were as real as men. It was here that shadows could kill!

wall so that it would cast long shadows on the bare wood.

Smith gave Peg some last minute instructions. "The one thing you must always check is the oil level in the lamp. It must always be filled. The light must never go out. If it does, my life, and the lives of all in this town, will be forfeit. The only other thing you must do is stay behind the lamp. Do not let your shadow ever fall on the wall. Stay behind the lamp in the darkness. If you don't, not only men will have died from the slayer that soon will be here."

Smith stretched out on the floor some distance from the lamp. He held his sword so that the sheathed blade laid across his chest, his two hands crossed over the weapon's hilt. Smith mumbled some words in what sounded like Latin. He closed his eyes. In seconds, he appeared to be asleep.

The door of the deserted inn was open to the chill night air. Thin tendrils of fog drifted into the room like ghostly fingers. The wind whistled in the darkness. The night was damp and uncomfortable. There was a strange expectancy everywhere. The mist slowly settled on the floor, giving the entire room a sickly grayish coat. Peg shivered and huddled closer to the solitary lamp.

Smith's breathing was growing shallow. The rise and fall of his chest became less and less noticeable. The girl stared apprehensively at the man. She remembered his command never to move into the shadows and thus remained motionless. Peg could not discern any movement by the man. To all appearances, Smith was dead.

It was impossible for the girl to stifle a scream at what happened next. Smith's shadow was moving. The shadow of the lying man arose, sword in hand, and walked away from the lifeless body. A two dimensional figure kept in existence only by the light of the one lantern. The shadow moved to the back of the tavern. The body still remained, a strange sight, a material object without a shadow.

In silence, the shadow man drew his sword and stood facing the open door of the room. The shadow was waiting for someone, or something. Peg turned and waited as well. In a few minutes, it came. A nightmare thing, the Shadow Beast!

Out of the night, from out of the darkness, it was a shadow of absolute blackness. A huge monster which slid across the far wall towards the unmoving body of Morgan Smith. The beast seemed puzzled by the body's lack of a shadow. As the thing moved, Peg studied the midnight hunter.

The monster was a giant cat. In many ways it resembled the lions and tigers which Peg had once seen in a travelling carnival. However, the beast had no mane. It stood some five feet tall at the shoulder. Its front legs were much more developed than those in the rear, giving the beast a somewhat slanted appearance. The monster's tail swayed back and forth as it moved across the far wall. Peg swallowed hard when she noticed two huge fangs that extended downward from the creature's upper jaw. Though the girl did not realize it, here was the most terrible of all killers that had ever walked the earth. The shadow killer was a sabertooth tiger.

The shadow of Morgan Smith stood awaiting the beast. The man's black sword was held out before him. The battle was not as uneven as it first seemed. The monster easily outweighed Smith and was probably many times stronger than the man. However, to get to the man, the beast had to get beyond the shadow sword. Normally, this would not be too

difficult a task for a monster as swift as this tiger. But in a two dimensional world, swiftness made little difference. The sword was like a bar across the hunter's path.

The tiger raised its head. Shadow eyes seemed to glare right at Morgan Smith. Soundlessly, the beast roared. It had spotted the shadow in the back of the tavern. The battle had begun. Shadow beast versus shadow man!

Shadow Magic

For several seconds the shadow tiger stood motionless. It was obvious to Peg that the creature had never before encountered another shadow prepared to give it battle. Already, the girl was beginning to comprehend the terror which walked by night. This shadow beast could affect other shadows. It was uncanny but true. The monster killed the shadows of men, bringing about, in some unknown way, their death.

Smith's shadow crouched, sword now held close to the belly, point aimed straight at the tiger. The scene was like a cardboard cutout. Black shadows in the dim lamplight. Then, the tiger moved forward.

Stillness, then incredible motion. The shadow beast was as fast as lightning. It took two incredibly fast steps and then was in the air, its front paws out, claws extended. The monster's huge jaws were open, and they gaped like the gates of Hell.

Fast as the monster was, Morgan Smith was just as quick. The same instant that the beast leapt forward, the man moved. No action was wasted. The man dropped down to the floor, his body flat, head drawn under his hands. The shadow beast tried to swerve in mid-air, but there is no way to turn in only two dimensions. The creature went flying over Smith's head.

The creature was whirling around even as its legs touched the ground, but it was too late. Smith was already up, and his sword was a black arc of death. The strange shadow blade sank deep into the dark body of the monster. The tiger waved a paw high in the air, desperately trying to claw its tormentor. An unheard shriek from crushed jaws echoed in the shadow world. The monster sank to the floor. It did not stir. A dying shadow.

Silently, Peg stared at the giant black shape. The thing was dissolving. Slowly, the shadow was melting into nothingness. It was like watching ice turn to water and trickle away. In but seconds, there was nothing left of the last remnant of the world's most terrible killer. Only the dark shadow of Morgan Smith, again armed with his sword, remained on the far wall.

The shadow man walked over to where his body lay. The black form stretched out in exactly the same position as the motionless body. For a few seconds, nothing happened. Then, Smith's body shuddered. The man began to breathe. Life had returned. Man and shadow were reunited.

A bit shakily, Morgan Smith rose to his feet. He smiled at the anxious face of the girl. But, when he spoke, his tone was grim.

"It is as I thought. This sorcerer is the most powerful magician I have ever faced. His powers might be even too much for me to conquer. That monster was a creature unlike any I have ever seen, even in the shadow world. He must be incredibly powerful, and unbelievably old."

Seeing the confused expression on Peg's face, Smith continued, "The battle is just begun. I have killed the monster which preyed on the men of this town, but its master is still alive. As long as the Shadow Lord lives, he can send out shadow after shadow on his grisly errands. We must strike

now, before he realizes that anything is wrong."

Their destination was the grove at the edge of town which gave the village its name. A circle of oak trees, the area had a very bad reputation. Smith was quite confident that it was from there that the Shadow Master sent his minions.

Smith left his sword at the deserted inn. He took no weapons. Instead, he had the girl carry the same lantern which he had used in the shadow fight. "Cold steel will do nothing against this fiend. Keep the unshielded part of the lamp close to your body. Light may be our only weapon against his shadows."

As they walked in the dark, damp night, Smith spoke, Not directly to the girl, but aloud so that she might know the menace they fought. The man reviewed what little he knew about their adversary, trying to prepare for the upcoming fight.

"There are two types of shadow magic. The Druids knew of them both, and they were masters of the art. Since then, much of the knowledge has been lost. The only bit I have ever been able to learn was the releasing of my shadow from my body which I used to defeat the shadow monster.

"Using a lost spell, a magician can prepare a magical weapon. This weapon, usually a sword or spear, not only slays his enemy but allows the sorcerer to capture the victim's shadow as well. That shadow, an integral part of the dead man's soul, is forced to serve the wishes of the Shadow Lord. Usually, these shadows have very little effect on material objects. Only in a place of power can they attack living beings. However, they can affect other shadows. And that is where the other type of shadow magic comes in.

"A man without his shadow is a man missing part of his soul. Such a person is vulnerable to the desires of a powerful wizard. A sorcerer can drain the helpless victim's soul from his body. A man's soul is the essence of his life force. A being who lives on the souls of others does not die. As long as the Shadow Master drinks the souls of strong men, he is immortal.

"Thus, we know this man's powers. He sends out the shadows of men and beasts he has slain in combat with his magic weapon to kill the shadows of people who cannot protect themselves from such efforts. Then, the Shadow Master drains the life force from these shadowless people. It is a dark and powerful magic."

The grove was pitch dark. After they took a few steps towards the center, Peg noticed that there was an eerie glow in the air. Dim firelight seemed to cling to the branches of the vast trees. Witchfire glistered on the grass. As they made their way through the grove, the glow grew stronger and stronger.

The two finally emerged in the small clearing at the center of the grove. The moon shone down like the baleful eye of some evil demon god. Thirteen half buried boulders radiated white fire in a circle enclosing a shrunken red thorn tree. Scores of half seen black shapes flitted to and fro in the clearing. At the base of the thorn, a man sat, a long wooden spear held in his hands. His laughter, deep and sardonic, floated across the grass, mocking them. Here was the Master of Shadows.

Shadow Death

Without hesitation Smith stepped forward into the circle of stone. He turned to beckon Peg forward ... and the girl was no longer there. Instead, another stood in her place.

She was beautiful. Young, shapely, and very beautiful. Her body was soft and supple, with heavy breasts and firm thighs. Her skin glowed golden in the soft light. She was nude and



seemed to revel in that fact. Elfin, impish eyes stared into Smith's own.

"Welcome, stranger, to the land of shadows," she laughed in a voice like the tinkling of fairy bells.

Smith did not return that grin. He looked around in annoyance. It was as if he was in a pocket of blackness. Only the girl was visible. All else was darkness. He stepped forward. The girl's smile widened.

"Welcome, for all are welcome here. Rest with me. I am yours to give you pleasure."

Smith took another step forward. As she looked deep into the man's eyes, the girl's smile faded. Smith stepped even closer. A flash of worry crossed the girl's face. "I bring you only love," she exclaimed, trying to move back away from the giant.

"And I bring only death," growled Smith as he grabbed the girl's arm. It was cold, terribly cold, the coldness of the grave. His other huge hand gripped the naked girl by the neck. "In this grove of power, even shadows may live. But if they live, they also can die. Is that not so?"

With a shriek of pain, the girl was gone. In her place was **Peggy Wayne**. "Release me," she cried, "Smith, let go! It's a trick. Stop!"

Smith laughed, a cruel sound. "Child's tricks, Shadow Master. Do you think I cannot judge reality?" Smith's grip tightened. The girl shrieked again. There was a dull snap and her head hung limp in Smith's huge hand. Grimly, Smith shook the body. "Enough of these games. Show yourself, coward."

The darkness wavered and was gone. There was nothing in Smith's hands. **Peg Wayne** stood close to the adventurer, looking at him with beseeching eyes.

"You suddenly seemed to disappear. I couldn't see you or anything else for that matter. So I just closed my eyes and prayed."

"Probably the smartest thing you could do," grunted Smith. He gave the girl a quick summary of what had just occurred. "Trying to fool me with cold and dead flesh," the adventurer snorted. "I expected better. Come, let us meet this King of Shadow Magic."

Peg followed the man, shivering in fear. The girl knew that this place was one of those 'places of power' which Smith had mentioned. It was here that shadows had the power to affect material objects. In this circle, shadows were as real as men. It was here that shadows could kill!

Black shapes swirled like ghosts all around the advancing pair. Cold hands rubbed across Peg's body. Ghostly voices whispered in the girl's ear. Dark faces peered into her eyes. The shadows of many men were here. The shadows of many men, all with a hunger within them. These shadows were just awaiting the word. They were hungry, hungry for life.

There were many different types in that strange group. Tall powerful men, with long drooping moustaches and horned helmets, armed with long swords and spears. They wore no armor. Peg knew them to be the sea rovers, Vikings, who had raided the coasts of England for a thousand years.

Also armorless were lean savage men, wolf-like in appearance. Clad only in furs, even their shadows had a ruthless, menacing air. Harsh sons of Eire, the only men ever to defeat the Northmen in a pitched battle.

Proud and aloof from the wild menaces of the others were the well armored sons of Rome. Clad in their short togas and body armor, carrying only the short swords which had made Roman legions the greatest fighting forces of the ancient world, a group of such shadows remained apart from the others.

Nearly a hundred of the shadows were in the grove. Warriors from a dozen places and times, all under the command of the Shadow Master. Picts, Germans, dapper Renaissance dandies, all slaves to the King of Shades.

The adventurer and the girl stood before the red throne. The Shadow King had risen as they approached and stood facing them. He smiled. His weapon of power, a long stabbing spear, was gripped tightly in both hands. His face, glowing in the witch light, was a harsh, cruel one. Eyes burned red; sunk deep in his face. He was a short man, a full head shorter than Smith, but his shoulders were as broad as the adventurer's. His arms were long and brawny. His body was scarred in a dozen places. He wore only a leather loin-cloth but did not seem bothered by the cold. He was a strangely barbaric but lordly figure. His laughter roared like thunder in the small clearing.

"She amused you, did she not, Smith? Ah, I startled you. Yes, I know you, Morgan Smith. My shadows make fine spies. They hear all and report to me. I have known of your presence from the first minute you entered this town. I sent my shadow beast to test your strength. I was not disappointed. You are powerful. And my shadow temptress proved to me that you are no fool. Your shadow will make a fine replacement for the killer you bested."

"You seem quite confident of your powers," retorted Smith. "Do you think I would have come to this place if I had not been positive that you would not be able to harm me? Remember, once I too served the Dark One."

"Yes, I had almost forgotten that," mused the Shadow Lord. The man cried out a quick phrase in a strange tongue. Dozens of shadows swarmed around Smith. The man did not even have a chance to struggle; he was held in an unbreakable grip by the shadows. The Shadow Lord laughed. "Here I reign supreme. But, since you warned me, I take no chances."

"The Romans defeated the Druids. Your magic is not as strong as you think, Black One."

"The Druids!" the other man mocked. "You fool. I taught the Druids what little shadow magic they knew. I am the greatest master of shadow magic who has ever lived."

Bragging, the man continued. "When I was born, monsters like the Long Toothed Slayer and the Hairy Tusked One ruled the earth. Men were like animals, fearful for their lives. Only a few dared face the unknown. Only a few dared pay the price. I have served the Dark One since the beginning of history."

"The city of Ys once was my home. I lived there, worshipped as a god, until the fools tried to overthrow me. In my anger, I had my shadows descend upon the city destroying it. There were great powers in those days, and in that battle, Ys sank beneath the sea. But, I survived, and my power grew."

"The Druids thought me the Dark One incarnate. They paid me a price, a price in life, to learn the barest fringes of my shadow magic. They were fools, with their mumbo-jumbo of meaningless rituals, but their sacrifices gave me strength. And the battles they directed against the Picts and the Romans gave me a chance to capture more shadows."

"You see shadows all about you. Nearly a hundred here. There are more, thousands more. Even I can only control a certain number at one time, unless I just let them roam wild, as I did in Ys." The man laughed. "They hate me, you know. They still can hate. But as long as I am master, they must serve. They serve me for all eternity."

The muscles in Smith's arms were taut. He was breathing deeply. To Peg's eyes, he seemed to be growing bigger. His eyes were burning bright with a black flame.

The Shadow Lord continued to talk. It was evident that the man had never before had such a captive. He enjoyed listing his triumphs.

"The Picts worshipped me as a god! Their greatest king, Brian, of the clan Mac Morn, paid me my due in blood to help him in his battle with Rome.

"I have bargained with emperors in a score of lands. My influence has been felt—"

"Up the lantern!" roared Morgan Smith in a voice that could not be disobeyed.

Without stopping to think, Peg, who had gone unnoticed and thus had remained unbound, raised the lantern high over her head. Bright yellow light flooded the clearing.

Normal light clashed with witchfire. For the barest second, shadows flickered and weakened in the bright glare. Smith lunged forward. No shadow, material or not, could hold this man in his full fury. With a bellow, he swept down upon the shocked Shadow Master.

The smaller man stumbled backward. It was too late. Smith's hands grasped the man's spear with a grip of steel. He wrenched the weapon from the Shadow Master's hands. **Stunned, the Shadow Lord darted under the shelter of the red thorn tree.**

Like a giant statue, Smith stood in the center of the clearing, the spear held high over his head. He laughed in triumph. Shadows whipped around him as if in some wild pagan dance. Witchfire flickered and flashed.

But the Shadow Master had not accepted defeat. Fists clenched together over his head, the man was chanting in the same unknown tongue he had used to command his minions. Now they no longer obeyed him. They were slaves of whoever held the spear used to capture them. But, Morgan Smith did not know the language to command their obedience. And, the Shadow Lord was summoning *his* Master.

The chant grew in volume. It echoed through the grove. The witchfire on the tree branches burned like hellfire. The thirteen stones of power blazed with unholy light. Even the frenzied shadows suddenly stopped moving. Over the red thorn, a blackness devoid of all light, of all substance was forming. A darkness unlike any shadow, blacker than blackness. The One-Who-Cannot-Be-Named, master of the Shadow Master, was coming to the aid of his servant.

"Lucifer!" shouted Morgan Smith in terrible anger. "He thinks to summon the Dark One to his rescue. His magic lies in this spear — this spear which is no more!"

With a roar, Smith brought the weapon down hard across one knee. With a crack like lightning, the wooden shaft snapped in half. The Shadow Lord screamed like a frightened animal. The shadow of Lucifer was gone. The witchfire had dimmed and now was fading to nothingness. The man stood alone and frightened beneath the red thorn.

Quickly, Smith pulled the girl from the circle of thirteen stones. The shadows were moving. Slowly, they encircled the thorn tree. In a place of power, shadows could kill. The Shadow Master had ruled them with his magic weapon for untold centuries. He ruled no longer. The man had bragged how the shades hated him. Now, they were free of his rule. Now was the time for vengeance!

"Tomorrow," Smith said, "the townspeople can dig up the stones. That will destroy the place of power forever. The shadows are harmless outside such a place. Soon, they will vanish to the nothingness denied to them for hundreds of

years. With the death of the Shadow Lord, the menace is ended."

As if echoing Smith's words, a shriek of terrible agony arose from inside the place of power. Peg shuddered, but Morgan Smith just shook his head without pity.

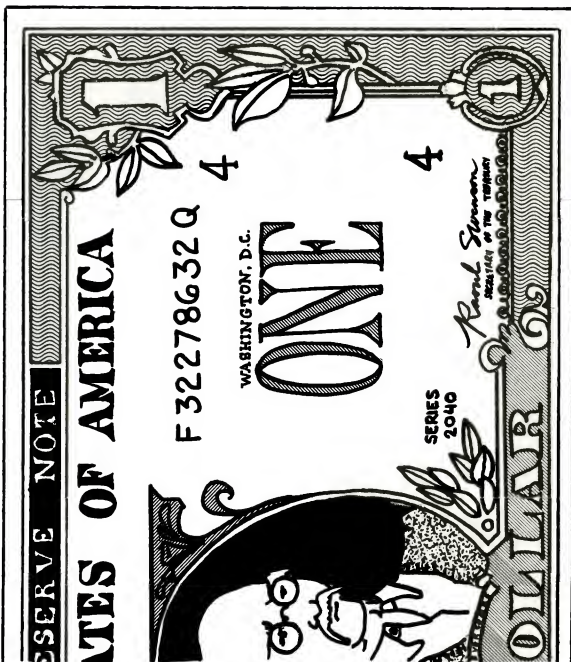
"They are fools. All fools. They think that they can always take and never pay. All things have a price. Lucifer is not denied his due. Evil always destroys itself. Such evil is self-consuming. It was just a matter of time before the fates caught the Shadow Master in his own trap."

Peg Wayne smiled. The fates, with a generous nod to the power of Morgan Smith. ■



Richard McCabe

THE RICHEST MAN IN THE WORLD



The figures ran across the Big Board: . . . CON ED UP 1—CONN INSUR UP 3/4—CORE INC DOWN 2½—COUNT CORP UP 11¼ . . .

Silas Evercrombe sank back in his flex-seat with a woof of expended air and tension. A corpulent, sweating man came rushing up, wiping his hands nervously across his form-fitting coverwear.

"Silas! I just saw the latest print-out. Did that do it? Did that put you over?"

Evercrombe smiled weakly. "I think so, Bill. If I've been keeping track of it right, that should just about do it. Let's check it on the comptroller and make sure."

He swung over to the worn computer outlet and slowly punched in the data, double checking the numbers. Bill shifted his weight from one foot to the other, impatiently. The computer blinked, rattled, and coughed out a printed sheet.

Evercrombe captured the plastic flimsy and studied it carefully, trying not to let his features broadcast his exultation. Bill stopped trying to read upside-down over the top of the printout and finally stood tapping his feet expectantly, finger wrestling with himself to keep his hands still.

"Well? . . . WELL?"

Silas let his grin reveal itself and expand across his face. Harumphing and posturing his chin in the absence of a drum flourish for the proclamation, he read, "NET WORTH: Two billion, three hundred sixty-four million, nine hundred four thousand, thirty-three dollars and twenty-two cents."

"By Getty, it's true! You've outdone Claghorne by at least 5 million! Wait till that old penny pusher hears about it!"

"Now Bill, Claghorne's not such a bad sort. Besides, I'm an

older penny pusher than he is."

Bill wasn't listening. "I can see him, peering at the Board like it had started reading out race results for the dog track; screwing up his face like the lights are too bright and wondering why it's lying to him—"

"Don't get excited. He may catch up before the day is over."

Bill looked startled for a second, then let a derogatory smirk smear itself over his face. "Aw, g'wan. A Jack Wheeler like you? Tell me, Silas, how long have you been at this?"

"Oh . . . probly about seventy years, I'd say. . . ." Evercrombe drawled.

"Seventy years. Shyst! You're gonna have to drop a few hot tips to your buddy sometime. Right now I have to spread a rumor."

Bill bounced to his feet and literally danced out of the office into the roar of the market floor. The noise was a physical presence that swallowed him up like a huge vat of thick syrup. Evercrombe called after him.

"Wait! It won't be official until the end of the day!" But his voice was carried away in a wash of garbled wheeling and dealing. Snatches of maniacal laughter drifted back to him like flotsam, interspersed with faint echoes of " . . . old penny pusher . . ." Bill must have been screaming at the top of his lungs for even that much to be distinguishable, but such was the atmosphere of intent insanity on the floor of the Stock Market that nobody took notice of him except for the few startled, preoccupied souls that Bill would randomly grab, mouth some joyous, indiscernible babble to, and then dance away from like a happy idiot.

Evercrombe worked for the rest of the day in a curious state of mixed apprehension and anticipation; waiting for a last-minute-desperation deal of Claghorne's to become apparent. It never came. By four o'clock, the usual noise of the Market seemed muted; most of the brokers knew by then and were waiting for the last bell. At four-thirty a tidal wave of applause rose from the floor and reached Evercrombe in his office. He looked out and saw the entire assemblage facing his office and banging their hands together. He waved happily and returned inside.

At last Silas made the call to his wife that he had been holding off until this moment. "Hi!" he bubbled as she appeared on the vuphone. "It happened, just like I hoped, even better than I hoped. I did it! I did it!"

His wife smiled faintly, slightly bemused. "Did what?"

He tried to calm himself, realizing he wasn't making sense. "That half million shares I bought from the Countoff Corporation; they split! Went over 11 points. Went over 11 points!"

His wife, still not quite following him, said cautiously, "Is that good?"

"Good? It's great! Fantastic! It put me over the top! My net worth is higher than Claghorne's now!"

"Well... that's very nice. I'm very happy for you. Uh, where are you now?"

"I'm here at the Market, of course. Don't you understand? I beat Claghorne. I am now the richest man in the world!"

"Oh, Well, I always knew you'd be the most something someday, Silas. Listen, do you suppose the 'richest man in the world' could do a little favor for his wife?"

Even his wife's lack of enthusiasm could not quench Evercrombe's high spirits. "Yes, of course! Anything!"

"Well, I understand that that antique table I've been wanting came in, and I wonder if you would stop by and pick it up."

"Certainly!"

"Fine. Come home for supper. Bye."

"Goodbye!"

Her image flickered and died. Evercrombe became aware that people were pounding on the door. He activated the seza-me switch and the door slid open to admit three men and a welter of loud confusion. Bill pranced in, followed by a snooper with a mobile trans-news unit strapped to his back, and finally, Val Claghorne himself, carrying the trophy.

The snooper stepped forward and stuck out his hand. "Silas Evercrombe? Glad to meet you. Hallard Danel, New York News Central. According to the Market ref, you're the richest man in the world. Congrats, and all that. Could we get a shot of Mr. Claghorne handing over the trophy to you. Face each other and put your hands on it. Fine. Now, big smiles. Wonderful."

Claghorne relaxed to a tired smile. "Congratulations, Silas. You're the big cheese now."

"Ha-ha! Yeah, sour milk to you too. I take it you figure on passing me back next week?"

Claghorne shook his head. "Not at my age. I'm pushing a hundred and feeling it. I'm going to get out of the Market. Twelve years on top is long enough." And he left.

"Now, Mr. Evercrombe," said the snooper, "could we have a little background? Like, how old are you?"

Silas felt a bit silly with the snoop audio staring him in the face over the newsmen's left shoulder and the videoscope jutting out over the right. He fought his tendency to lean towards the mike.

"And what benefits accrue to the 'richest man in the world'?"

"Besides the trophy, my name is entered on the Role of Magnates and I have first option on the Tycoon's Office here on the Street."

"Thank you, Mr. Evercrombe, and good luck!"

Taking the walkbelt away from the Street, Evercrombe soon came to the antique shop and found himself talking with the grizzled proprietor.

"Yep, this is a real fine table, but there's not much demand for it now. That's real wood, y'know," said the man, tapping

the table top. "But it doesn't fit in with the modern decor, y'know?"

"Yes. But my wife likes it and I'll be happy to take it. Fine." Pulling out a goods-transferral form he asked, "Name?"

"Silas Evercrombe. That's E-V-E-R-C-R-O-M-B-E."

"Status."

On impulse, he blurted, "I became the richest man in the world today!"

"No kiddin'? Oh hey, y'mean on the Street? Yeah? How about that. Well listen, congratulations. Let me put this down on my luxalot."

"No, no. I couldn't let you do that."

"Well then, let me make ya a gift of something here. We got some nice Chinese bamboo stuff here; they been unloading it like crazy to make up for their statecon imbalance. Or how about an antique Coke bottle, 'bout two, three hundred years old maybe. No, huh."

"We couldn't really use it. I'm not sure where we would fit it in. Our house isn't that big."

"Oh well. I owe you one. Here, take your ident back and here's your table. Hope you like it. Come back now, y'hear?"

Silas waved and left for home on a crowded rapitrans. He had to stand on the way home. He came in the back door to find Mz. Dilbirch, their next door neighbor, talking to his wife over tea.

"This tea must set you back on your luxalot. Why don't you buy the government issue? I can't see how it tastes much different."

Evercrombe's wife smiled into her cup. "Well, we don't indulge in much else and I guess we're just sort of old fashioned. Well, hello there," she continued as she saw Evercrombe coming through the doorway.

Mz. Dilbirch glanced up with a greating, then stopped and did a double-take. "What is that?"

"That? It's the antique table Nora had me—"

"No, no. Not that. That." Indicating his other parcel.

"Oh, this is the trophy I won at the Stock Market today. Pretty soon, they'll send me a plaque to put here. We can put it in the entryway, so people who visit can see it. It'll say: 'SILAS EVERCROMBE, THE RICHEST MAN IN THE WORLD'. And then it'll give the dates, depending on how long I stay there."

"But what is it, dear?" asked his wife, frowning at it.

"What is it? Why it's an enlarged, gold-plated replica of the currency plates for a U.S. dollar bill! I thought you'd recognize it."

Mz. Dilbirch shrugged. "I don't know much about foreign credit bills."

Evercrombe's wife stepped in quickly. "Well I think it's very nice, darling. It's... impressive." She smiled as she found the proper word. "Although I'm not sure we should put it in the entryway. Leave it in your study for now and we'll find a place for it later."

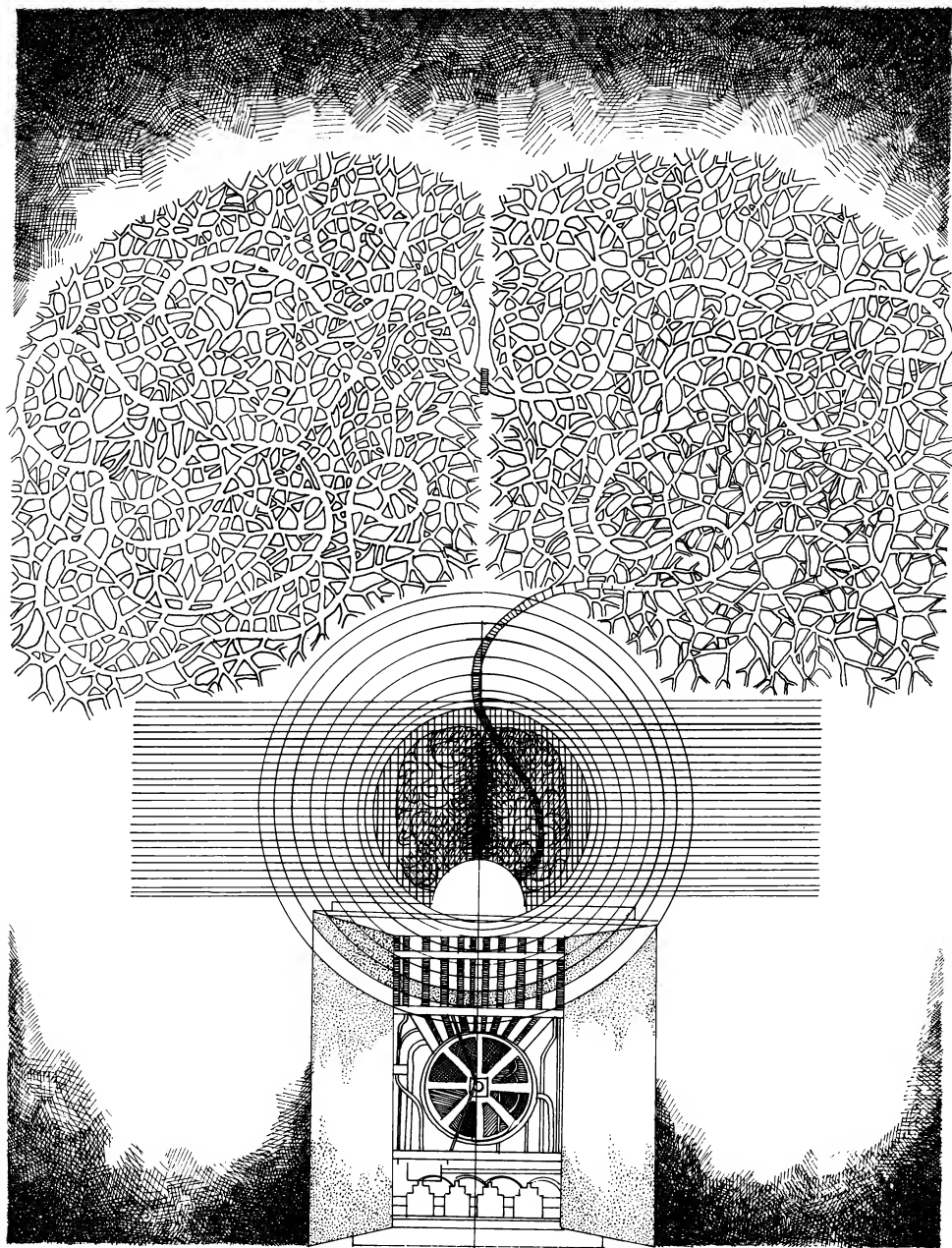
Exit Silas Evercrombe, head shaking.

Mz. Dilbirch leaned confidentially over her tea. "Tell me, hon," she whispered, "what do they do at the Stock Market?"

"Well," the other woman poured herself another cup of tea, "I'm not quite sure I understand it myself, but it's got something to do with stocks and bonds that change in importance according to 'bears' and 'bulls,' or something like that, on a 'Big Board.' And then they figure how much it all equals in dollars and whoever has the most is the richest man."

Mz. Dilbirch had been frowning harder and harder through the whole explanation until it looked like her forehead would crease down the middle. She was suspicious that someone was putting her on, but finally her curiosity got the better of her and she demanded in exasperation, "But hon, what good is it?"

Mz. Rilman, Evercrombe's enduring wife, sighed and then smiled in good-natured acceptance of fate. "Well," she replied, "it's nice to have a hobby." ■



THE WIDOW FIGLER VERSUS CERAMIC GARDENS OF MEMORY, INC..

H. H. Hollis

The computer readout on the client waiting in his front office was unbelievable to Corky Craven. With eyes stuck out like a crab's, the young lawyer stared at the graphs, figures, and terse computerese. DISORIENTED. That he could accept. He flipped to Mrs. Figler's questionnaire. Blah blah, blah blah, blah blah blah, Ah Ha! AGE: 23; MARRIED; CHECK HOW LONG: 25. Twenty-five of marriage for a twenty-three year old woman?

He fed the readout into a shredder. "I'd better see her. There's a wiped tape somewhere in this setup."

Despite her matter-of-fact shape and size and her obvious age of about fifty, the client wore an air of disinterest, almost of invisibility, as if she were in two places at once. Her solid, no-nonsense body, middle-aged and middle-class, was here; her attention was somewhere else.

In the client's chair she relaxed, flaccid, accepting, half-smiling, half-attentive. Sheesh! thought the lawyer. She came here for something. What?

Mrs. Figler's expression became beatific. Her face shone in some process of transfiguration; her energy turned wholly inward.

Corky sat up straight. "You're floating!" he said, both incredulous and indulgent. I've seen it all now, he thought. Somebody's mother, stoned in the street. Did she will to come here, or am I part of a drug delusion?

"I am floating, Mr. Craven," she said, in the faraway voice of one who wants to talk, but keeps her inner eye elsewhere. "Yes, oh yes, that's the problem. I, oooooohhh." Her voice drained off in a mixture of pleasure and perplexity.

"Yes? How can I help you?" he said. "Ms. Figler, are you there?"

She struggled back to the surface, and smiled again, at him, at herself. "Yes, all right, hold on, I'll get hold of myself in a minute. Unnnhhh." And she vanished again into the seraphic smile.

"Mizz Figler," Corky said, "I'm required to call a physician to attend to a client who is temporarily incompetent. Is the drug you're on presently classified as a dangerous substance? I can ask my cousin to step over here from the Hermann Professional Building, without saying on the phone what I want him for. If this is inadvertent, or if you have been the victim of an attack or of a wrongfully prescribed medication, he won't report it until tomorrow, and we'll have twenty-four hours to straighten it out. I don't think I dare just give you

a comeout, because I don't know what you're floating on, and I'm afraid you can't tell me. *Can* you tell me?"

"Don't call. Um. Hold on. Not drug. Problem. Ummm. I want to keep the thing."

"You want to keep your high? Of course you do. Everybody does. But we all have to come down sometime, ma'am. Would you rather I got you to a crash pad? The Harris County Drug Abuse Center operates an anonymous one in the downtown area. Are you a registered addict? The Narcotics Maintenance Authority has an office out on Cullen, about forty blocks from here. Tell me something. I'll help you. Don't worry. I'm not going to blow the whistle."

She struggled. "... not hm, hmm, *high*. Thing! Here!" She gestured weakly at the back of her head. "Ceramic Mausoleum." The last phrase came crisply, but with much effort.

"Ceramic Mausoleum! Sheesh, don't tell me you're paddling around downtown Houston with a platinum pottery computer stuck in your brain! Why, there are contractual sanctions against their putting you out on the street with that freaking connection in place. We'll sue 'em for a hatful. Do you have any physical injuries from banging into things? Did you drive here? Don't move! You should be in the crypt harness while you have that machine in your head. I'm going to call my cousin. I'd be afraid to touch it, but it's got to come out. How long have you been under its influence?"

She waved her hand weakly. "Don't call. No sweat. I, eruh, took the LSI chip when I left today."

"You stole it!"

She struggled upright. "I've paid for it."

Corky disliked touching women clients on their first visit, but he had to establish some kind of subverbal contact with her. He came around the desk and took Mrs. Figler's hand. "Paid for it has nothing to do with the price of nirvana, my dear. That little ceramic chip with the Large Scale Integrated circuits imbedded in it and wrapped around it and the little silver tail that runs down the receptor sinus to your cortical surface is like a doctor's x-ray. You pay for the service the doctor renders in reading the plate. You don't own the plate, even though, in a very real sense, you have paid for it. LSI chips are monstrously more complex than x-rays, and dangerous in the bargain. It takes a skilled operator to insert one, you're supposed to be confined while it's in place, and it may not be taken from the site of its repository. It produces a



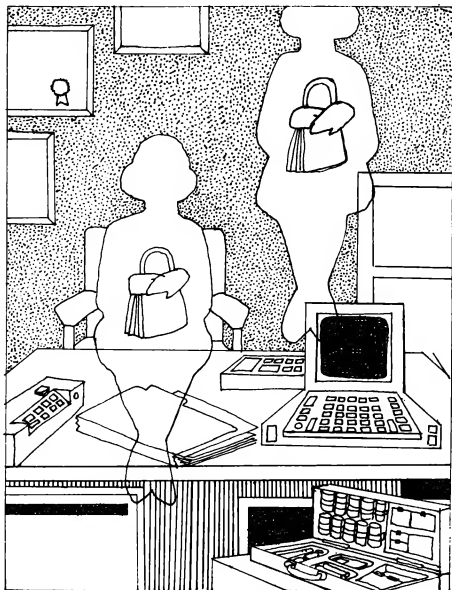
total hallucination. How are you managing to break through it? How did you get out with it? How can you even walk with it in place?"

She grinned, pure child's delight, and got out a long, slurred speech. "Not easy, lawyer. I trained, uh, a year. First, you know, taught myself to knit in the crypt harness, while I had the implant in place. I practiced slipping out of the restraints and, you know, walking around, er, the cubicle. Bought a fake chip and wore it for a month. Today I left the fake at the cemetery. Wore the real one out. Rode the tube; afraid to drive. I'm going to keep my chip."

Corky squeezed her hand, got back an answering squeeze. "I wouldn't have believed it. But if you could do it, it can't be wrong. We'll find a way to protect you. BUT MRS. FIGLER, LISTEN! That freaky brain tickler has got to come out while we do it. Nobody can stand that stimulation for long; and I need your full cooperation. That means your full attention."

She squeezed his hand, snuggled into the chair, and seemed to go to sleep. The seraphic smile lit up her face and then her whole body. Corky shook his head as he switched off the video channel of the phone and called his cousin.

Next day the interview was at the client's house. She had slept the clock around, and was clad in a quilted housecoat; but her hair was done, and her social smile was competent, warm, and encouraging. Craven's head ached with a night of briefing. He had kicked sparks out of a couple of computers. The best case is always in the next memory deck. No intelligence, human or mechanical, can predict all the ways that facts and logic will interbreed to produce law, their vigorous hybrid offspring. Even though the machines he chose were programmed for off focus scanning, this case was far enough out of the regular channels to baffle any computer program.



Could he succeed in containing the whole law suit in the irrelevant but inexorable drama of the Figler memory chip itself?

"Well," he told her, "we have the usual choice of legal routes. We can beat 'em to the courthouse and sue for an injunction or we can keep a low profile until they begin shooting at us, and then fire back. They might seek a writ of sequestration. We mostly use that to get back trucks and heavy equipment somebody has leased and won't return, but it's appropriate to recover any personal property wrongfully held by someone other than the rightful owner."

"I paid for this thing," she patted the back of her hair in a housewifely gesture. "I am the rightful owner."

"No, you didn't pay for it. You paid for its making and you pay for its use under your contract with the mausoleum, but you didn't buy the chip itself."

"Then we'd better be first in court, hadn't we?"

"Right. It's a pleasure to deal with a client who has an instinct for strategy. One thing, though. I hate to suggest it to somebody whose brain has stood up to the assaults yours has; but I really need the best grasp of the facts I can get, and the best way I can get it is by cortical ingestion. Are you game to let me trepan off a few cells to make a memory culture?"

"Mr. Craven, if it's necessary to give us an advantage in the trial, I'm game for anything. What are you really talking about?"

"Well. When the mausoleum lawyer and I open the trial fittings in our wrists and mix into our blood the hallucinogen the court has ordered, first one of us and then the other will be projecting 'facts'—the 'facts' as we know them from our clients—onto a dreamscape which is monitored by a trial judge. I get a better, a more accessible, more manipulable grasp of our facts, if I can take a few memory cells from you, culture your recollections, and ingest the whole thing. Lawyers love archaic language, you know. We just call it trepanning: it's done with a tiny needle and a gentle suction that you'll never even feel. May I ask, are you wearing the mausoleum's LSI now?"

"Oh yes, of course. It's my LSI, and I mean to wear it as much as I can. Does it make any difference to the process you want to perform?"

"I don't know. If you still have the lead from the chip implanted in your brain, how come you're not floating the way you were in my office yesterday?"

She smiled the self assurance of a woman who has conquered all her social embarrassments. "I'm in control of it today. The episode is still going on in my brain, but it's as if it were in another room with the door shut. I can open the door if I want to. I'm conscious of it, but I'm not dominated by it."

"I don't know if I ought not to get two samples from you, one with the implant in place and one without. I'd like to know as much as I can. Is the episode on your chip too, ah, intimate? or too precious? to be diluted by sharing it with me? I wouldn't really dilute it any, you know, or even be in possession of it in the same way that you are. The fact that it's sexual won't shock me."

She laughed. "You won't be shocked. Surprised, you will be. Are you married?"

"Not yet."

"Well, my husband and I had both been married once before. People who have dissolved their marriages aren't very good candidates for marriage, statistically speaking; but if you learned something from a bustup, your second marriage may be as steady as a rock."

"Yes, I've seen that effect."

"So we weren't starry eyed. And we had plenty of money."

Uh huh, he thought, that's what the computer showed. I won't have to apply to judicial for your fee.

"We didn't have the ceremony recorded, or our wedding

night. We kept the recording couples in place for a whole year, and then chose a dozen episodes to re-experience and make a final selection."

"Shall I guess what you chose?"

"Do you think you can?"

Corky smiled. "You chose a quarrel."

Mrs. Figler's eyes widened, then sparkled with appreciation. "You're very perceptive for a man who's never been married. How'd you know?"

"From divorcing a lot of my friends. A stable marriage is one in which the partners have learned to quarrel effectively. The couple that screams together dreams together, right?"

"Yes, well, ummm." She crossed her ankles, so that her feet, which had been flat on the floor, rested now on their lateral edges. The lissome curves of her feet below the malleoli bespoke a firm, resilient muscle tone. "All right, Corky, you can take your tissue culture."

Mrs. Figler's housecoat had not slipped open. No more of her legs was revealed than a moment before. Her hands were still demurely, loosely, clasped in her lap; yet Craven became intensely aware of her sexuality.

"Okay," he said. "I'll have Mrs. Grapnel, the legal tech I usually work with, come by today and hype out the cells necessary for the culture. And, please, I would like one specimen with and one without." He smiled professionally, gathered his feet to rise.

Beneath the housecoat, Mrs. Figler's knees came a few centimeters closer together, and the soles of her embroidered slippers were once again flat on the floor. The clasp of her hands tightened, almost imperceptibly. "Oh? You don't put in the . . . needle, is it? yourself?" Her smile was a little strained; the pupils of her eyes were aimed a little away from his.

Corky rose to go. "No. Experience has taught us that we get a better Schmuell-B culture when the cells are taken out of the skull by a skilled technician."

Her hand was warm and dry, its grip without pressure, as she bade him goodbye at the door. There was no hint of the passion which nearly drowned him when he ingested the cultures grown from a few of her cortical cells. The dead Mr. Figler had been beautifully matched to his wife in terms of marital infighting, and the battle they had chosen after a year of marriage to have immortalized in the tiny, complex circuitry of the ceramic memory bank, to serve the survivor as a neuronic memorial of the first partner to die, was a symphonic demonstration of exercising the muscles of a marriage by dynamic tension. From the earliest statement of the themes, *You Know Very Well What Nose-Picking I'm Talking About*; *Leave My Mother Out of This*; and *I Was Warned by All My Friends*; through the bravura second movement, *I Got Along Before And I Can Get Along Again*; into the slow, brooding third passage, mostly unvoiced, punctuated by slamming doors, sobs, and a sort of ballet performed by gulping Adam's Apples; through the rephrasing of the opening themes in a *scherzo*, *You Scratch Your Nose Anytime You*

Want; *My Mother Is A Termagant*; and *I Don't Give A Damn What Those Idiots Think*; to the deep whirlpool of the rapturously sexual last movement, the Figlers' quarrel was a classic.

For days after he first ate the memory of the fight, Corky Craven was involuntarily re-experiencing bits of it, bursting into laughter at a shaft of wit well placed in some-in-law, or sucking in his breath at some broadsword stroke that cleft a personal habit from top to bottom. There is no scoreboard in a work of art; but if there was a "winner", other than the marriage itself, it was Mrs. Figler.

The lawyer felt physically drawn into the quarrel, and sought to change the emphasis of the outcome, but he never succeeded. The surrogate sex experience gave him a spurious intimacy with a Mrs. Figler who was now, in a way, as dead as Mr. Figler. Certainly, Amanda Figler, widow, the client with whom he was conferring from day to day, was a visibly different person from the violent, stubborn young woman he knew in his head. Only an occasional touch of her hand as she left the office, or the visible flow of one muscle group over another when she reached across the desk to hand him some document, united the two women in the flesh. These disparate stereopticon images fired up the recording inside the lawyer's skull from time to time.

Once when he yelled at her in the office, he had to explain that her tone of voice in saying, "No, I won't," had turned on a replay of the opening passage of the argument. He could see that it amused her to realize that the attorney-client relationship was also, in some sense, another relationship, and that her voice and presence gave her power to move him in ways that he had to resist. He knew the Figler case was using up a disproportionate amount of his time, but such was the power of the recorded memory, even at one remove, that he could do little about it.

The ceramicized episode, however, was but part of the factual complex the lawyer had eaten up in the cortical soup of his client's life experiences. She had survived the explosion of a space yacht, when the Figlers had been blown out in a survival pod with a sun sail that would only half erect. The two of them had been compelled to suit up watch and watch, so that one spacesuited mass was always outside trimming and balancing the crumpled half-sail to the solar wind.

Eating less than half rations, they had exhausted the pod's food supply, and were running out of their own recycled water when they were picked up by a space guard cutter. Mrs. Figler, though gaunt, had joined her husband in trying to persuade the Greenjackets to sell them the cutter's spare lifeboat so they could finish the journey on their own.

Now she was embarked on another perilous journey. Either she made some new law, or she gave up the electronic urn containing Mr. Figler to Ceramic Gardens of Memory, Inc., and resigned herself to visiting the mnemonic parlor four times a year for the single permitted hour of wearing the ceramic chip that circuitized what Corky now thought of as FIGLER'S QUARREL. It took almost an hour for the recording

H. H. Hollis is the *nom de plume* of a lawyer whose practice is limited to the law of the sea. He has, in the past, represented trade unions and civil rights organizations. Hollis has served on the boards of various voluntary social agencies in Houston and is now specially involved with agencies dealing with the treatment and rehabilitation of drug abusers.

H. H. Hollis' academic background includes a Bachelor's Degree in Economics from Southern Methodist University, where he served on various editorial staffs, and a law degree from the University of Texas, where he published in the *Law Review* and served as a research assistant.

Hollis is one meter fifty-six centimeters tall, blue-eyed, blond-gray haired, married, childless, and a fourth generation WASP Texan who was once grossly overweight and is now relatively slender. His wife is small, brunette, brown-eyed, articulate, opinionated, Jewish and a New Yorker. Harlan Ellison has unequivocally declared that she is the more important member of the partnership. Both are fully qualified eccentrics.

H. H. Hollis is the author of "Sword Game," originally published in *Galaxy Magazine*, and anthologized in *Best Science Fiction 1969*, nominated for a Nebula Award, and published with the winners in *Nebula Awards 4*. "The Guerilla Trees," in *IF*, was nominated the same year for a Nebula, and also lost out in the voting. It has been read as a paradigm of U.S. involvement in "wars of independence", and if it is so, is a bitter indictment of cold war policy.

Hollis' mordant view of present day law is a theme which is to be more fully developed in a series of stories he plans under the general title of "Notes From the Day Book of a Space Lawyer". Cultural osmosis and cross fertilization are a continuing interest of the writer, whose professional specialty employs legal ideas invented by the Phoenicians, adapted by the Hanseatic League, systematized by English and American jurisprudence, and administered in the United States by Courts that are historically the champions of a competing system of justice.



to play itself out. If Mrs. Figler was tired, overburdened with anxiety, or at the wrong point of her lunar cycle, the quarrel would be slowed by her cortical static. It would not fully relieve itself within the hour; and she might have to wait three months to get out of the *scherzo* and into the climax.

Any compromise would create difficulties for Gardens of Memory. A substantial service industry revolved around the aseptic insertion of the silver tail from the chip into the cortex, supervision of the playbacks, and removal of the artifact under sterile conditions with due care for the client's physical and psychic well-being. Nevertheless, the ease with which Mrs. Figler had foxed Gardens of Memory, Inc., indicated that there was considerable laxity in exercising "due care for the client's physical and psychic well-being." If the memory tech on duty had been alert to his responsibilities, the Widow Figler would never have been able to substitute the fake chip and walk out with the three dimensional, five sensual, neurone actual playback running in her cortical wrinkles.

That may be the bent linkage that tears the whole machine to pieces, Corky said to himself. If Gardens of Memory isn't doing what it contracts to do to protect the client, and if no harm is coming to the client, then it doesn't need doing *anyhow*. and the agreement ought to be enforceable only for money but not for any specific performance by Mrs. Figler.

Interrogatories, the lawyer thought. My computer queries their computer under the Machine Truth Bond to find out what their drill actually is on chip removal and how often it's shorted in practice. And if their computer has been kept from the knowledge, the program of interrogatories in my computer expands to require drug questioning of all the memory techs. We'll soon sweat out who's following the drill and who isn't; and then we follow through with questioning the clients who were short programmed when they came out of the mnemonic cube.

"I'm loaded for bear, Corky. The law's against you, the facts are against you, your client's a thief and a cheat."

That'll incline Gardens of Memory to settle, Corky mumbled inside his head. They don't want to have to explain the facts of economic life to a lot of laymen who don't have the educational background to appreciate that all that tender loving care in the ads is just advertising.

Grinning at the thought of the strategic nerve center he was going to punch, Corky went to work programming the widening circle of interrogatories his computer would put to the mechanical bookkeeper at Ceramic Gardens of Memory, Inc.

If the information he wanted was in the mechaccounter, Gardens wouldn't even know Craven had gotten it. The Full Flow Information Act of 1980 had made full disclosure of facts between record keeping machines a legal requirement of life in the United States. Only if it became necessary to query human employees would the defendant be alerted.

Two hours later, Corky stared in disgust at the computer readout. "TEMPORARY RESTRAINING ORDER," it read. "APPEAR AT 1600 H IN HEARING CUBICLE 3-104 TO SHOW CAUSE WHY AMANDA FIGLER, WIDOW, AND ALL ENTITIES REPRESENTING HER SHOULD NOT BE TEMPORARILY ENJOINED FROM QUESTIONING EITHER ORGANIC OR INORGANIC MEMORY STORES RE CERAMIC GARDENS OF MEMORY, INC."

I slammed the door on my own hand, Corky said to himself, but it still hurts. I should have known they'd have a telltale programmed into the access lanes of their damned computer. So. Now the corpse groaned, may as well open the coffin all the way. To get into Gardens' mechaccounter, he had needed to allege only that a controversy existed between the widow and the corporation. Now he quickly fed into the legal computers the pleading he had originally prepared, asking for a declaratory judgment that the ceramic chip was Mrs. Figler's property and for an injunction to bar Gardens from any attempt to obtain possession or to control its use. He put in alternative amendments seeking damages both for the unnecessary strain imposed on Amanda Figler by restricting her to four hours a year of neuronic reunion with her husband; and, if it should be determined that her wearing the chip out of the crypt was harmful to her, for the negligence of the memory tech in allowing her to escape with it. As a last amendatory thought, he alleged that, according to the ads and regulations of the defendant, the gravity of the risk in allowing a client to wear a chip out of the crypt and into the teeming life of Houston was so great as to nullify the doctrines of contributory negligence and assumption of risk and prevent their use as a defense by Gardens.

It was 1400. Craven injected an artery with .03 milligrams of feelstam and took himself out of circuit until time to go to Harris County's ancient granite courthouse for the show cause hearing, which he expected to be perfunctory and mechanical.

Oscar Hempweed, acting for Gardens of Memory, had amended his pleading by the time of the hearing to state a full scale action to recover the chip from Mrs. Figler. As it turned out, the sixth floor monitor cut off the hearing cubicle inputs after thirty seconds of three dimensional integration of the pleadings. There was no satisfaction to either Craven or Hempweed in gazing at the lucite prisms in which the judge's assessment of the pleadings was imbedded. The pattern of competing allegations, Figler's in tiny orange globules, Gardens of Memory's in minuscule green stars, showed an ungainly interweaving of two skewed helices without any decisive knot for either. The mechanical decision was totally useless, both parties being simply enjoined from any act which would denigrate title on the part of the other.

The two lawyers looked at each other and laughed. "Whack," said Corky. "Jack," cried Oscar. "And ungefrak!" they shouted in unison. The obscenity cleared the air between the two advocates.

"We'd be better off with a simple calculating machine," said Oscar.

"We might as well be in late Medieval Britain, trying an action for trover and replevin."

"Right! Couldn't be in more of a formal straitjacket. Oh you quick, non-technical, fact-oriented justice, where are you now? Incidentally, Corky, did you know that the British have reintroduced optional trial by physical combat?"

"Huh?"

"S'fact."

"You mean they bypass the drugdreams? Sheesh, they've thrown away two generations of advances in legal thinking."

"I don't know. 'Trial as a dream of Truth' isn't really much better, is it, Cork? I mean, you didn't get your reputation as a hardnosed trial lawyer by being more truthful than other lawyers; but by being more skillful than most at putting your version of the truth on the dreamscreens."

"That's the game, man! It's human, it's a skill, it's something a judge can relate to real life, it's not just some kind of mechanical chew-up and spit-out justice."

"So why do we need to try this one? Your woman's got our chip. Give it back and we'll forget the whole thing. There's justice."

"Aw, come on, Ozzie. There wouldn't be any chip if it weren't for the Figlers' memories circuitized on the thing."

Hempweed smiled and shut his brief case, the little pocket pharmaceutical kit which is every trial lawyer's basic tool. As

he started to rise, Craven experienced a hunch so powerful it could not be denied. Try it now! his unconscious mind screamed. The impulse was almost audible. Deliberately, he damped any reactions that might show on his face or in the tilt of his ears.

Craven threw his brief case on the counsel table, waving at its syringes and phials of hallucinogens. "Pick a poison, Hemp," he said, casually reaching for the fitting in his wrist that would connect him to the blood mixer with his opponent, driving the drug through both their brains simultaneously. With his knee, he activated the hemispherical dreamscreens inside which the facts of their clients' cases would be projected through the lawyers' filter of trained reflexes.

Hempweed sat down again, but made no move to take his own case of drugs back out of his pocket. "You must be half high already. Do you think you know all you need to know to try this case? Or are you just bluffing? I'm loaded for bear, Corky. The law's against you, the facts are against you, your client's a thief and a cheat."

"What the hell, let's get it over with. I got stuff to work on that's interesting, not this contract junk. What's your pleasure? Converted cannabis? Rectified lysergic acid?"

Hempweed was unsmiling, alert, obviously convinced of his own mastery. Come on! Corky yelled inside his skull. Stick in the needle. Let's go. If I can just get you to hallucinate with me while you feel that safe, I may be able to pull it off. To the dreamscreens he murmured, "Get us a judge." Ducking his head, he saw a glowing skeleton gavel appear inside the screen. Good! For once, the sixth floor wasn't asleep.

Hempweed screwed the blood mixer to his own wrist fitting with the smiling air of a chess master setting a queen in a power square. "Which drug?"

"Anything, anything you choose. Not demerol, okay?"

"Demerol it is!" and Hempweed tapped the buttons to the sixth floor computer. Desperately, Corky stabbed at his console as if to counteract his opponent. Since he had, in fact, struck the same keys, the ramp came back with electronic speed, "Demerol stipulated."

"Stipulated? Wait a goddamned minute," Hempweed began. "You faked me out on that, Corky . . ." In that instant, Craven injected the pulsing vein in his elbow. Heartbeats later, the drug was pouring into both their bloodstreams and Corky was in full projection. No languid courting with

neuronic strokes today, no delicate feeling up his opponent's amygdala. At a deep level, where KNOWLEDGE lay rooted in Corky's personality, he KNEW Hempweed was right in terms of conventional contract law. If Craven let that be the battleground, he was lost before he started. No, this trial had to be transferred to some raw, primitive ground, the farther from full consciousness, the better.

If only one of the advocates had opted for demerol, then the dosage would have been moderate, even if the sixth floor had chosen it; but when both lawyers punched it in, the standby computer had ordered almost enough to blank out the forebrain. No airy bridges of logic would surmount this dream. It was locked into the primitive tracks of the animal brain.

Craven did not congratulate himself. All he had accomplished was to choose a favorable terrain. Now! He marshalled his neuronic troops in full strength. While Hempweed was still floundering in a daze of synthetic morphine, bitten with chagrin, Corky sought to launch a dream on which he could float home undefeated even when he lost conscious control.

With his heart pounding, great gouts of blood singing in his ears and distending his pulses, Corky cut in the opening bars of FIGLER'S QUARREL. Ever so delicately, he insinuated himself into an analog of his client's role. Could he succeed in containing the whole law suit in the irrelevant but inexorable drama of the Figler memory chip itself?

Suddenly his psyche stung, and Corky's heartbeat slowed with pleasure. In the dreamscreen a male polar bear, massive as a winter god, struck his mate, turned his back and walked away into the snow. Craven's head rang with the blow even as his savage emotions propelled the female bear upright from the drift where she had been tossed. Her teeth sank in the big male's hindquarters, and Craven felt his jaw muscles cracking with the power of the bite. A rich, bloody, bear fatted, bestial joy suffused him.

The ursine mask felt right. It would parallel the symphonic structure of FIGLER'S QUARREL, but on a muscular and nervous level beneath words. Hempweed, now firmly snared in the polar bear simulacrum of Figler, spider webbed in demerol, would never be able to remember, let alone articulate, the sophisticated contractual concepts on which his case depended. Craven rolled over from another full pawed blow, and chuckled into the snow. Reaching up for a moment into his memory of the actual quarrel, Corky tasted the next words in Mrs. Figler's crisp voice: "God damn it! You didn't marry my mother . . ." He smiled, knowing he had played that argument over so many times the ending was inevitable, grooved in his memory as if he had lived it and loved it in his own self.

Corky looked over the male bear's shoulder at the dreamscreen, waiting for the court's golden imprint. "Injunction granted;" but only cold polar stars appeared. He suddenly knew he wasn't going to like the end of this dream. Fur and snow notwithstanding, when FIGLER'S QUARREL played itself through, he wasn't going to be able to forget that it was Hempweed with whom he was coupling. On well, he thought, deep in the caress of the demerol, don't knock it 'til you've tried it.

Two weeks later, he was bidding goodbye to Mrs. Figler in his office. "No," he said, "they don't want to appeal, and we shouldn't appeal. There's just enough risk of the trial result's skewing the appellate court and overturning the whole contractual base of the ceramic mausoleum industry that C.M. Inc. is afraid to take it. Of course I'd like to get my name in the books on a significant case, but you didn't come to me to aggrandize my professional reputation. You wanted to win, and you've won; or at least you haven't lost. I can't justify the appellate fees and expenses when the ultimate result might be unfavorable. You didn't get what you wanted, maybe, but you got what you needed."

"Well, . . . what does it mean, exactly, the order we've entered? How can you say we've won, just because we haven't lost?" Both hands held a square, hard handbag firmly on her lap.



Pallie; old snoogums; smiles just won't hook up. Metaphors fall light years short.

HEAVY METAL

Dave
Bischoff

You mean to tell me you weren't there? Didn't make it, shoogie? Yea, yo; I know 'twas sold out, but there were the scalps, pill! Where ya think I gained my beauties? Fifty creds I sucked out for 'em. Worth every work unit.

What was it like? Pallie; old snoogums; smiles just won't hitch up. Metaphors fall light years short. 'Twas what 'twas, and that was it. No josh, boyie friend. Would I josh you, now?

Oke; apols accepted. Will try. Will try hard.

Ya know where 'twas, dontcha? Yeayea. The new complex Center. Only place for it yoknow. All parklot levs jammed, man. Helipads packed. Just bout anyone who's anyone scened it and scened it huge, cigar roaches lit and steaming. Paper duds and capes streaming. Colors like a rainbow on mindmess. They had oinkers porking round and about, but they might as well have forgotten it, the good or bad it did. We were just too too massy for control. I even hear they had a crowder up in the loft, so's there was no rio. Also heard same crowder blew fuse or two when they tried to stoke it up. Haho; to laugalot. 'Twas our night of might, pallie!

Me? I was duded to the eyeteeth. Yoursmostrue was sport-ing flares chartrues that flared so much, they flamed. Blew in with a twenty footer light-dabbed cape flying on G-tabs, piping away at my minihouk like a loco motive spinning wheels. Had Baby on my heels timed out on chronos powder, babbling wordpernanosec bout Martians invading. Told her only Martians found were dustbugs. She just kept on spouting her mouth.

We slid into that cavernhall, and the sight of the site shot our heads to shreds! Peoples, pallie; peoples coating the bottom and sides of the ad like locusts after Mormon wheat. And all grooves—our peoples, buzzie!

Picture it, shoogie: snap on your head's cube tube and I'll zap the electrons your way.

It's the biggest aud in the world. Holds hundred thou easy, without busting guts. Lights on ceiling like the facets in a bee's eye. Strobes, crobes, globes and phobes. A dozen spotlights fencing, like Doggie Fairbanks as Zorro. Even had sparkers flinging bout like fireflies on summer night. The infras and ultras got to your oc nerve even if ya closed eyes. A trippy treat for the eyeorbs, alone.

Those lights hit us first. Baby and I shuffled to our seats like pair of resurrected Egypt mummies. You seen the old flickers, right? I wonder if maybe I was smoking up Tanis leaves stead of Acapulc. Giripal stopped stammering bout Martians and started yapping out dumbtalk. Brain circuits overloaded.

I put her down in her seat and strapped her in, connecting only half of the feeling attachers. Zunked out, she was. Only could take somuch.

Oh, yeah, yeah; put whole kabizzer on self. Even masterplug in tummybutton jack. Gotta have medoc's oke to do that, yaknow.

Couple wisers front of us. Oldies come just ta listen to the music. No attachers. Sad. Kept on punning round till I got almost sick.

"Wire we here?" says one.

"Hope it's not TOO shocking," says other.



And onwards. I pushed a few knobs and fidgeted few more dials, and just phased the punfunners right out of my self-verse. Two much.

Then I whipped out me binocs and took long study of stage in center of all the kink-o-chaos. Yoknow, that dazed dais is just one big amp? With lotsa little ones stacked up along back of it, like Great Wall of Maoland. All the synthas and moogs and other instruments were already set up. Couple of roadies were still putting in feely attachers to the house switches.

The duede cams were warming up, flashing smoky imagics on dozen or so different screens. Kinda like old parent days when teevee was just a single radio-eye staring out into live-rooms. Had cammen panning and zooming for up closes of various peoples getting hooked and droned up for show.

I started to warm myself up too, zennin a chant or two and fuzzing up to nice pitch, thank you.

When all peoples were filed in, seated, attached and soaring, it started. The show showed!

Sidemen rose up on stage through trap doors. You know 'em. Pegleg Mareson on drums. Honky Tacker bass. Mike Shog on lead. Plus whole army for various mood moogs and electrohorns, not to mention lights, feelies and psychers. We all cheered and poured down good vibes on them. They all had same uniform. Black tightshorts. Gilt stilltboots. Velvet sashes. White gauze shirts, ballooning over arms. Rings on hands, ears, noses. Hair long one side short other.

Talk bout pro, man! They didn't e'en have to tune up. The show was on. They started spinning down a layer instro. Just music. Three flashes of fiery smoke, and there were three backup chickies. They almost popped my eyes, shoogie, they

did. Flasher outfits, pallie. Flasher! One sec multi-color dresses. Satin shoes; pink ribbons. Next sec, just strings! Next sec, ZAP! Naked! Next sec, all leather. And all together, in beat. In rth! I was getting hotted up just through the eyespheres already. Couldn't wait till they juiced the feelies!!

Peoples started getting excited. They whooped up lotsa noise an' cheers, cos they knew who was coming. Was shoutin' myself, was I.

Then a pop-jock formed in on the holo, big as a building above us all. Lucyfer; beezbub; Ol' Nickell!!! Sound whooshed in mouths like vac cleaners. An' bove music, which was already loud, Mr. Pop-Jock throbbled out in profound basso—profundo: "Groovfrens, girlpallies and sibies. Herr Señor Sir Mister Psychrock—ZASPER NEBULA!!!!!!"

Suddenly, total silence. Total. The holo pop-jock faded out and so did music. Shooogie, none of us e'en breathed. Then, all at once, Mike Shog licks down high string like polysiren. Pegleg hits a gong. And the band puts through a chord ya wouldn't believe that blasted all involved right out of their heads. Then down to a drony thingie tingle, building up on the moogs and psychs. I could feel it waving in through buttonjack.

Someone screamed, "There he is!" And Yea, there he was indeed. Floating down from ceiling on a cloud that flashed with lightning and rumbled out thunder. He had on this gold glittering robe that was so bright 'twas hard to look out. Like universe going nova.

He snaps fingers, and CLICK—there's a mike in his hand. He starts singing.

Dunno where I am
Dunno where I been
Just drifting in for a song or few
An' feel your ears with sin!

The cloud stops bout five meters bove stage, and Nebbie swan dives off, does a trip-reverse flip, and is just bout to slam feet onto hard hard plastic when retro rocs strapped on his legs boom an' flash. When smoke clears, he's down and into 'All My Future's in the Past'. All this he does blinking nary an eyelash. Struts bout stage like King Rooster, does he, screaming out the words e'en o'er the tidal wave of sound sound his hand is pushing out.

Got no time, got no time.
Past is fast; it's a crime.
Livin' life in zero gee.
Sellin' hours for a fee.
All my future's in the past.
All my presents just won't last
Gotta live now, gotta give the
beat
Here, where past and future
meet.

And on so.

You know the words, right shooogie? Every groov knows 'em.

Wellie, fella! Twas wondrous indeed way the teenbops eyes beamed. Cardiacs avalanched. Medocs carrying them out by scores for a quick revive. And the show'd not hardly begun. Nebbie was just warming up, thinkin' bout going into first gear.

Let me do a freeze on ya. You seen pics and holos of the flippie, correct? Do no justice; they just do not. Nein nyet nay! NoNoNo! Nebula oozes IT out of all orifices from mouth to pores. And ya can't see his real face! Every sec or so, or when he feels like it, he rips off mask he's wearin' and there is yet another one grinnin', frownin', sneerin', clownin. All trips in themselves.

Freeze frame through.

On with show.

Finishes first song. And audience is breathing so hard you'd think they'd been running. We clap the chap. He bows.

"Thankoo, thankoo, Laddies and gentlewomen. Luv it, luv it. Now for presto chango!"

And backup chickies string out long curtain circle bout him.

Band hits into next number. Slow one; sad-waves start coming through wires. Chickies flip off curtain, and there is Nebbie in an old Limysuit with red bowtie and frownface that twitches into sighing smiles on choruses. Flashes start going up an' down minespine. Like there was something osobeautiful osowonderful I wanted, and I can barely see it, let alone grab it. Looked at Baby. She was sobbing. Likewise rest. Me too.

"So much for toucher jerk-tear," smiles HE. "Now kick up heels, and steady on switches, 'cos we gonna psych you on the Cosmos Bike and rock you to where there's no clock!"

Shooogie, the rest is history. Mine mind warped into hyperspace. Don't remember whole lot. Just some songs, and thinkin' I wasn't me. I was everybody. I was the aud. I was the band an' all the instruments. Pallie; I was the universe!

An' most of all, I was Zasper Nebula.

Yeahyeah! New psych feature. First time used in world.

Puts you right behind the psych-star's eyes; 'tween his ears.

Shooogie, all those folksies out there of a sud were cheering, clapping, breathing, living for ME ME ME! I was the psych-rock king of the world. I went up and down and all round flying diving singing and watching it from the audience, all at once.

I checked later on my time. Concert lasted two hours.

Could have been two secs, two years, two millenia, far as it concerned me.

Words cannot express with success.

Was dimly aware of Zasper/Me finishing up with last song, and house lights brightening, and me feeling like I just got washed in and out by a high pressure waterhose. Strange feeling. Sort of an enigmatic enema of the soul.

We were all zunked out, mindwiped. The whole room.

But dazed only a moment were we. Zasper was still there, bowing and posturing in rth to rain an' thunder of ovation. Standing? Nay—a floating ovation, more like.

Then, don't know how, but group, no, big gang of teenbops charged through all oinkers round stage and zeroed in toward Zasper.

He kinda smiled, an' zipped up forcefield round self.

"People friends," he screams into mike, "Final mask of Zasper Nebula!" An' he rips off face, an' stead of another one, all there is! 'e is electronic circuitry!! He's a robot, pallie! He pulls out his fingers one by one and throws them to the bops. Chucks off feet, hands, arms and likewise hurls them to frothing, fainting lilgrins. An' then forcefield snaps off. Crowd surges in. An' BOOM! just before they get to him, his head spouts off his torso, a little round rocket, and shoots off for the ceiling and the darkness.

"Don't forget, kiddies. Buy my spoos. Ta ta!" echoes his voice as it zooms up an' up.

An' that was the show end.

Managed to jog self out of dizzy, an' 'disconnected self an' Baby, who was a wreck. All straggly hair and wide space eyes. Got up an' pulled her behind me like she was a ragdoll.

Now friendomine; all these are but words and talk-talk. At that moment of my linear life, I had no words to call my own. But a flopping, tongue-lolling teenbop, of all peoples, summed it all up within mine earshot on the way to our transpo: "Twas all so . . . asexual!" An' a lil flit of a girlchild, she with those heavy heavy words.

An' that's it, pallie. Too bad ya couldn't come up with the credits to scene it. As you may surmise, twas something.

What? Yeah! Glad ya noticed. Both of 'em are prosth. Next month the arms get bronzed. Year or two, maybe torso too. An' if I save up some creds pulling some undertime, I'll make it totally cyber. The ultimate! A sible, shooogie! It's the thing, ya know. It's . . . it's so asexual!!



The King in Yellow has been referred to as the most important work in supernatural fiction between Poe and modern times.

CHAMBERS AND THE KING

Robert William Chambers (1865-1933) was an American novelist and illustrator who was noted in his time for the large number of historical novels and romances he produced. The one work for which he is mainly remembered today, however, is a collection of short stories written at the beginning of his career: *THE KING IN YELLOW*.

He studied art in Paris for seven years, and returned to the United States in 1893 to begin a career as an illustrator for such magazines as *LIFE* and *VOGUE*. The following year he put out a book entitled *IN THE QUARTER*, in which he attempted to write about his life as an artist in Paris. However, it was in 1895, when his second book was published, that the turning point in his career was reached.

This second book, *THE KING IN YELLOW*, won him so much critical acclaim, that he decided to turn his career from drawing to writing. It contained, in addition to several more Parisian sketches reminiscent of *IN THE QUARTER*, and a collection of prose poems, the five fantasy stories on which most of his fame now rests. Four of these revolved about the common theme of a fictitious evil play entitled "The King in Yellow" that had devastating effects upon its readers, and it is with these stories that we will be most concerned.

Soon after *THE KING IN YELLOW*, he put out a few more fantasy collections including *THE MAKER OF MOONS*, *THE MYSTERY OF CHOICE*, and *IN SEARCH OF THE UNKNOWN*, but he was never again to equal the height of supernatural horror that he had hit with *THE KING IN YELLOW*. His work quickly became commercially oriented, and he turned to the production of mundane novels, which although popular at the time, have long since been forgotten.

THE KING IN YELLOW has been referred to as the most important work in supernatural fiction between Poe and modern times, and at least one contemporary book review compared the work to that of Poe. It has been reprinted many times, in whole and in part, including the Books For Libraries edition in 1969 and the Dover edition in 1970, and the individual stories have enjoyed endless reprints in magazines and

Lee Weinstein

IN YELLOW

anthologies.

One of the unique aspects of the book, and probably a major reason for its popularity and influence is the central idea of having a number of seemingly unrelated stories tied together by a common mythical background, an idea which H.P. Lovecraft was later to develop independently, and much more fully. In none of the stories are we given a clear idea of what this mythical backdrop actually is, yet this gives the imagination a free reign, and provides another major reason for the book's popularity. As the book review column of the June, 1897 issue of *GODEY'S MAGAZINE* put it: "... This group of stories, varied in idea, yet bound together by one subtle thread: the baleful influence upon the life of everyone that reads that mysterious volume, 'The King in Yellow.' The spell of this wonderful book is wisely left unexplained and vague. It floats shapelessly and stealthily into the story... like the effluvia of a fatal marsh."

E.F. Bleiler, in his introduction to the Dover edition, refers to this obscurity as "a deliberate barrier to comprehension" comparable to "The Mysterious Card" by Cleveland Moffett. This may be a bit exaggerated; we are made aware of the general intent of the mythical elements, although certainly the meanings of the specific elements from the fictitious play are deliberately kept vague.

The four fantasy stories that revolve about this obscure background are *The Repairer of Reputations*, *The Mask*, *In the Court of the Dragon*, and *The Yellow Sign*. The fifth fantasy story in the book, *The Demoselle d'Ys*, is quite powerful in its own right, but is thematically unrelated to the other four and will not be dealt with here.

The central element of the mythos is "The King in Yellow", itself, a fictitious play in two acts in which depravity is raised to the level of art. The idea was apparently taken from *THE YELLOW BOOK*, a risqué and daring periodical of the late 1800's. In a 1928 anthology of material from *THE YELLOW BOOK*, the introduction describes the periodical in very similar terms to those used by Chambers in describing his "King





in Yellow." Both are poisonous and sinful. An unfavorable book review of the time bearing the title "More Yellowness", also stressed the comparison of Chambers's book with the scandalous periodical, calling Chambers "a martyr to degeneracy." As Marion Zimmer Bradley pointed out in her article *The (bastard) Children of Hastur* in NYCTALOPS No. 6, the word "yellowness" had during the late 1890's the connotation of wickedness, decadence, and spiritual danger. She also stressed the comparison of Chambers's THE KING IN YELLOW with THE YELLOW BOOK, noting that they were both credited with the ability to corrupt.

Since the four stories take place in the future, as we shall see, perhaps Chambers was extrapolating what would become of the "Yellow Book" concept if it were to reach its absurd extreme with the passage of time.

The first story, *The Repairer of Reputations*, is introduced by a poem entitled *Cassilda's Song*. This poem, supposedly from Act 1, Scene 2 of *The King in Yellow*, sets the mood for the entire group of stories by introducing us to the mysterious city of Carcosa, where black stars hang, and twin suns rise and set. These and other related references form the fabric of the mythical backdrop that permeates the stories.

In *The Repairer of Reputations* we are introduced to the somewhat utopian atmosphere of the United States 25 years in the future (The book was published in 1895; the story is set in 1920). All major political problems have been solved, bigotry and intolerance have been eliminated, and, suicide having been legalized, the government has erected the first Government Lethal Chamber. This chamber, a symbol of purification, stands in contrast to "The King in Yellow" which has "spread like an infectious disease from city to city, from continent to continent".

The plot centers around a madman named Castaigne, who, working under a deformed lunatic named Wilde, hopes to become king of the United States. Castaigne, who narrates the story, tells us at the beginning that he has read "The King in Yellow" during the convalescent period following a fall from his horse. It is not made clear whether his ensuing madness is due to the injuries to his head or to his reading of the play, but it is the play that has motivated both him and Wilde in their lust for power.

The poem *Cassilda's Song* introduced us to some of the mythical trappings associated with the play. In *The Repairer of Reputations* we find these elements, plus several new ones integrally related to the mad lust for power that afflicts the two central characters. Thus Castaigne is pathologically fascinated by a manuscript of Wilde's entitled "The Imperial Dynasty of America" opening with the words: "When from Carcosa, the Hyades, Hastur, and Aldebaran", and ending by naming him the new king (The significance of these and other allusions to the play will be dealt with later).

In his mad frame of reality, Castaigne believes that in order to become king, he must prevent his cousin Louis from marrying Constance Hawberk, Louis's fiancée. To accomplish this, Castaigne and Wilde send an assassin, another man haunted by the insidious play, to murder Constance. It is this that proves Castaigne's undoing, as foreshadowed by the assassin's self destruction in the Government Lethal Chamber.

Yet there are strong hints that there is more to the nefarious schemes of Wilde and Castaigne than mere madness. Wilde

seems to know about a secret past of Constance and her father. He also predicts, correctly, where a certain piece of armor, missing for years, can be found. Obviously, he does possess certain knowledge that surpasses our plane of existence. As the epigram in French at the beginning of the story warns us: "Do not deride fools; their follies will last longer than ours." This possibility, that there may really be something behind their ravings, lends a certain edge of horror to their activities. Throughout the story, a deliberate ambiguity is set up regarding the reality of the narrator's delusions. In one scene, Wilde sends a Mr. Steylette from his door, who, he explains, is *the* Arnold Steylette, owner and editor-in-chief of a well-known newspaper. Wilde adds as the man leaves, "I pay him very badly, but he thinks it is a good bargain." Does Wilde actually have a powerful newspaper editor under his control? The only tangible evidence we have been given is the knock at Wilde's door, and the voice claiming to be "Mr. Steylette." Yet somehow our disbelief is partially suspended. Wilde was telling the truth about the armor.

In a following scene, Wilde goes on to say that he is in communication with ten thousand men; and that within forty-eight hours he can have the state and country rise en masse excepting places that have not received the Yellow Sign. The fanciful dream of a madman. Or is it? Where in the smooth transition of events did reality leave off and sheer madness begin? There lies the true horror of the piece.

Again, later in the story, Castaigne is intruded upon by his cousin Louis as he is trying on what he describes as a gold diadem studded with diamonds, which he has removed from a steel safe in his room equipped with a time lock. This is what he will wear when he is "King," by his "right in Hastur" of America. Yet his cousin refers to the crown as being brass, and to the safe as a "biscuit box." Perhaps the crown *is* brass, except in the deluded mind of Castaigne, but there is the definite possibility that Louis merely assumes it to be brass because that is the more likely possibility. And is his biscuit box comment to be taken literally, or as sarcasm?

In addition to this form of psychological horror, there are a few elements of real physical horror. The description of Wilde, with his flat, pointed head, his artificial ears, and his fingerless left hand is quite gruesome. Even more horrifying are the scenes in which he has been clawed to a bloody mess by the cat he perpetually teases, and in which he finally has his throat torn open by the creature. Chambers often seems to associate cats with death, as can be seen in *The Street of the Four Winds*, also from THE KING IN YELLOW, and in *The Man at the Next Table from THE MAKER OF MOONS*.

From greed and lust for power in *The Repairer of Reputations*, Chambers leads us to falsity and self-deceit in *The Mask*, the second story of the series. In *The Mask*, we have a love story about artists in which the mythical "King in Yellow" elements fall into the background, while a definite fantasy-science fiction element enters the forefront in the form of a liquid that turns living things to stone. Yet, it is obvious that this story is taking place in the same milieu as the first one. The statue of "The Fates" upon which Boris Yvain is working throughout, is the same statue that is seen standing before the Government Lethal Chamber in *The Repairer of Reputations*.

The story itself centers about the triangular love affair between Boris, the girl Genevieve, and the protagonist, Alec. Genevieve has professed her love for Boris, and Alec has withdrawn himself until, at the turning point, he discovers she really loves him.

The horror of this piece is much more subtle than the previous story's, and works along two parallel tracks. The first track is built around Boris's chemical solution, and the horror

Through the course of the story, we see two frames of reality superimposed on one another; the realm of "The King in Yellow" lurking beneath the apparent reality of the Parisian streets.

gradually mounts as Boris progressively petrifies a lily, a goldfish, then a rabbit; the final outcome being the accidental petrification of Genevieve. The second track is horror of a more spiritual nature, as Alec gradually comes to realize the deceptions of Genevieve and himself.

"The King in Yellow", which Alec happens to chance upon at the turning point, seems to reflect symbolically his own condition as he falls ill. The quotation at the beginning of the story, (incidentally the only quotation from the play besides *Cassilda's Song*) illustrates this symbolic connection. In the quotation, Cassilda and Camilla are terrified to find that a stranger whom they have asked to unmask is wearing none. This seems to be reflected later, at the story's turning point, when Alec realizes that he has been wearing a mask of self-deception to hide his love of Genevieve from himself, as well as from her and Boris, and that this self-deception has become an inseparable part of him. When Alec's friend Jack Scott asks the doctor "What ails Alec to wear a face like that?" as Alec succumbs to delirium, we know it is because of the two years of hiding the truth from himself and his friends. When Alec overhears the question, he immediately thinks of the Pallid Mask from "The King in Yellow." Assuming this to be the mask referred to in the opening quotation, it would seem that Alec has realized he is a personification of the stranger whose apparent mask is a part of him.

Again, in this story, we find the same type of ambiguity that was a keynote in *The Repairer of Reputations*. When Boris calls Alec to see the goldfish turned to stone in the magical fluid, there is "a feverish excitement in his voice." In the next sentence, Alec states, "a dull weight of fever lay on my limbs . . ." It is shortly thereafter that he chances upon and reads "The King in Yellow." Then, after Genevieve, who actually is delirious with fever, reveals her love for Alec in front of Boris, Alec himself falls ill with fever and delirium. It is unclear what has caused his illness. Was his mention of the "dull weight of fever" on his limbs to be taken literally, or was it a carryover of the "feverish excitement" in the previous sentence? If the second is true, are we to assume that it was the reading of the play that induced his fever? As we shall see, the play does seem to have this effect in the following stories. Or did he merely catch the fever from Genevieve, who also seems to have been stricken inexplicably. Here, too, Genevieve's illness seems to be a symbolic externalization of her own hidden feelings. It was apparently triggered by a sprained ankle she sustained after Alec had startled her, as she was crying alone.

However, the ambiguity here does not add so much to the effect of the piece as the subtle blend of beauty and horror surrounding Boris's solution. The description of the beautiful play of colors surrounding the transformation of lilies and goldfish into their exquisitely sculptured and beautifully tinted marble counterparts, perfectly counterpoints the disgust Alec feels at the thought of turning living creatures to stone. But beauty overtakes the horror at the end when the effects wear off, and Alec and Genevieve, masks removed, are free to begin anew.

In *In the Court of the Dragon* we finally lose the ambiguity of the previous tales, and come into a direct confrontation with the realm of "The King in Yellow." The story is short,

direct, and achieves considerable effect as the protagonist is pursued through the city by the pale-faced, black-garbed organist, only to awaken at the last instant before capture to confront the "King in Yellow," himself.

For the first time, in this story, we see the actual effect of "The King in Yellow" on the reader, without the vagueness of before. We are told by the narrator at the outset that he is in the church for healing after having "three nights of physical suffering and mental trouble" from reading "The King in Yellow."

Through the course of the story, we see two frames of reality superimposed on one another; the realm of "The King in Yellow" lurking beneath the apparent reality of the Parisian streets. As the protagonist sits in the church at the beginning, he thinks he sees the organist leave twice. This duality is reasserted at the end of the chase as he awakens and thinks, "I had slept through the sermon . . . Had I slept through the sermon?" and again with, "I had escaped him . . . Had I escaped him?"

This dualism makes the story ambiguous, but on a higher level than we have seen so far. While in *The Repairer of Reputations* we were merely uncertain as to the reality of the protagonist's schemes in a concrete setting, here we are uncertain as to the concreteness of the story as a whole, presented, as it is, as an internal fantasy. "The King in Yellow" has become real; but only in an unreal, or at least uncertain setting. The hints of concrete reality, the indifference of the congregation to the organist's playing, and the race through the streets of Paris are later negated as they are revealed to be possibly a dream sequence.

In *The Mask* we saw hints of the nature of "The King in Yellow." In Alec's delirium of imagery from the play, the only sane thought that persisted was his own internal lie, persisting through the maddening ultimate truth of the play. In *the Court of the Dragon* now allows the nature of the play to emerge much more fully. H.P. Lovecraft in his essay, *Supernatural Horror in Literature*, refers to "primordial Carcosa . . . some nightmare memory of which seeks to lurk latent and ominous at the back of all men's minds", and calls it an "eldritch land of primal memory." In *the Court of the Dragon* bears out this interpretation beautifully. The protagonist, after awakening in the church, realizes he has always known who his pursuer really was. The primal memory has been awakened. He states (twice, significantly) "Death and the awful abode of lost souls, whither my weakness long ago had sent him, had changed him for every other eye but mine." It is significant it was his *weakness* that had banished his strange pursuer. At the close the protagonist has gained the strength to realize the nature of these latent memories and to comprehend the ultimate Truth. It is only then that the church walls dissolve away to reveal the black stars and the towers of Carcosa in one of the dazzling pieces of imagery that were Chambers's forte. Yet this is only the prelude to the final image as he sinks into the increasing waves of radiance and hears the "King in Yellow" whisper, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God!"

Thus we see that this play, the ultimate in "yellowness" is the key to unlock some unthinkable evil truth that we have long sought to suppress with decency and morality.

The Yellow Sign is the final story in the series, and is generally conceded to be the most powerful. Certainly, it has been the most frequently anthologized, probably due to its final combination of supernatural and spiritual horror with actual physical horror. We have again returned to the real setting of *The Repairer of Reputations* and *The Mask*, as the protagonist, Mr. Scott, tells us when he says of "The King in Yellow": "If I



ever had had any curiosity to read it, the awful tragedy of young Castaigne, whom I knew, prevented me . . ." Yet the reality of the realm of "The King in Yellow", made apparent in the dream-like setting of *In the Court of the Dragon*, assumes tangible concreteness in the setting shared by the first two stories. There is no denying the common dreams shared by Scott and his model, Tessie. But the corpse-like watchman, and his fight with the newsboy, removes any doubt that supernatural events are actually occurring. A man whose finger comes off from his soft mushy fist during a fight, is definitely not a being of the natural world. Yet it is not until the story's climax that these events begin to tie in with the play. Scott and Tessie realize that the dreams are centered around a black onyx talisman, engraved with what they discover to be the Yellow Sign, when a copy of the play mysteriously turns up in his studio. It is then that they realize the watchman has come for his talisman, but too late, for their doom has been sealed as prophesied in the dreams.

The fantasy elements of the story closely parallel the realistic elements. The first warnings of the supernatural are Tessie's dreams of Scott being driven in a hearse by the watchman. It is a direct result of these dreams that Tessie and Scott become romantically involved with each other. This culminates in Tessie giving Scott the onyx clasp inlaid with the Yellow Sign as a token of her affection, thus sealing their fate. In their whole relationship there is a hint of sin; of "yellowness." Scott feels himself unworthy of Tessie and is distraught that he has kissed her. As a result of this "sin" she is no longer able to pose nude for him; they have tasted the forbidden fruit. This anticipates her reading the forbidden fruit of "The King in Yellow", resulting in his reading of it also, and their final departure from this life. But as the verse at the beginning of the story says: "Let the red dawn surmise/ What we shall do/ When this blue starlight dies/ And all is through." With every death is the promise of rebirth. This verse does not appear in some reprinted versions.

The mysterious Yellow Sign, about which the story revolves, is really the only tangible symbol of the play's content that we are given. In *The Repairer of Reputations*, the only other story that mentions it, we are given a few clues to its significance. At one point, Wilde tells Castaigne that the portions of the country that do not follow when the alleged takeover occurs, "might better never have been inhabited," for he would not send them the Yellow Sign. Thus we see that the Yellow Sign is intended as a tangible symbol of the other reality of the play, used here to indicate allegiance to the "King in Yellow" and his realm.

In *The Yellow Sign* we see the effect of this unasked for sign of allegiance on two unsuspecting people. They are gradually drawn into something they are at first unaware of, and later do not understand, until they have read the play. It is only then that the final revelation occurs. After they have read it, Scott tells us: "I knew that she knew and read my thoughts as I read hers, for we had understood the mystery of the Hyades and the Phantom of Truth was laid." This last remark could be interpreted as saying that the thin veil of what we consider to be truth has been torn away.

Later, after the watchman has come for his talisman and Scott lays dying, he goes on to say: "I could tell more, but I cannot see what help it would be to the world . . . They of the

outside world may send their creatures into wrecked homes and death-smitten firesides . . . but with me their spies must halt at the confessional." Clearly, again we are made aware of a much greater truth beyond that which we know. His reference to "those of the outside world" is an important clue here. The implication is that the great Truth he has unwittingly discovered is internal. This rings true in all four of the stories. Castaigne and Wilde were dealing with what appeared to be their own mad fantasies; Alec's realization of his self-deception was of course internal, as was the protagonist's plight in *In the Court of the Dragon*. And now here, in *The Yellow Sign*, we are told, despite the physical presence of the dead watchman, that again the ultimate revelation belongs in a subjective reality. Indeed, there is no physical reason for their deaths.

It is well known that Chambers got much of the mythical backdrop for his imaginary play from Ambrose Bierce. Two of Bierce's minor short stories provided Chambers with material: *Halta the Shepherd* and *An Inhabitant of Carcosa*.

Halta the Shepherd is a parable about a young shepherd boy and his fleeting moments with a beautiful and elusive girl named Happiness. In it we see him praying to the god of the shepherds; a god named Hastur. This is the first appearance of a name that was to survive, in a variety of forms, to present day fantasy.

An Inhabitant of Carcosa is a short tale about someone resurrected as a spirit upon the ruins of Carcosa, the ancient city that had been his home in life. The story is introduced by a short quotation describing various types of death, ascribed to someone named Hali. (Another Bierce tale, *The Death of Halpin Frayser*, also begins with a quote from this mythical personage). The story contains a reference to Aldebaran and the Hyades, and the spirit to whom the tale itself is ascribed is named Hoseb Alar Robardin (from which Chambers apparently borrowed the Alar).

Although it has been said that Chambers built his "King in Yellow" mythology upon the background provided by Bierce, this is not really the case. True, he borrowed names from Bierce's tale, but the use he made of them in no way corresponds to the original. Carcosa was no longer an ancient city of the Middle East, but a strange fabulous place under a double sun, whose towers can be seen rising behind the moon, and where black stars hang in the heavens. Hali no longer referred to an author of mystical quotations about death, but rather to a lake whose waves are of cloud rather than water.

In *An Inhabitant of Carcosa*, toward the end of the story, the narrator exclaims: "Looking upward, I saw through a sudden rift in the clouds Aldebaran and the Hyades!" He has just discovered that although it appears daylight to him, it is actually night, for the stars are visible. Compare this with a line from *The Mask* as Alec describes his fevered delirium, "Aldebaran, The Hyades, Alar, Hastur, glided through the cloud rifts which fluttered and flapped as they passed like scalloped tatters of The King in Yellow." The similarity is obvious, yet equally obvious is the change in meaning, import and purpose that Chambers had brought about.

Special mention should be made of Chambers's use of the name Hastur to clarify its later incorporation into the Cthulhu myths. Although Bierce used it as the name of a benign shepherd god, Chambers merely sprinkled the name through his stories without ever bothering to explain what it referred to. There are a few vague clues in *The Repairer of Reputations*. Castaigne says at one point, ". . . the people should know the son of Hastur", and later he raves, "I was King, King by my right in Hastur." One other grammatically ambiguous sentence mentions, ". . . the establishment of the Dynasty in Carcosa,

the lakes which connected Hastur, Aldebaran and the mystery of the Hyades." Aside from these three vague references, the name Hastur, like the name Alar, only appears in groups of other names, some referring to places and some referring to people. Apparently, Chambers liked the sound of the name, and merely threw it in where he thought it sounded good; he didn't have any particular meaning in mind. To illustrate this, the volume's fifth fantasy story, *The Demoiselle d'Ys*, although unconnected to the four King in Yellow stories, has a human character named Hastur. In his later works, *THE MAKER OF MOONS* and *THE MYSTERY OF CHOICE*, he also tends to play around with names and meaningless words, carrying them from one story to another.

To the names he took from Bierce, he added a large measure of his own. In addition to the Yellow Sign, and the King in Yellow, himself, there are the Pallid Mask, the Phantom of Truth, Cassilda and Camilla, Yhtill, Demhe, Uoht, Naotalba, Aldones, and so on. Some of these apparently have some import, as we have seen, while others seem to be meaningless. Cassilda and Camilla, as well as the King himself, are characters from the fictitious play, while Uoht, Thale, Naotalba, and Aldones may or may not be. Demhe seems to refer to a lake like Hali. The Pallid Mask acts as a symbol of falsity in *The Mask*, while in *The Repairer of Reputations* it seems to represent the truth of the play ("... the state, the whole land were ready to rise and tremble before the Pallid Mask"). The Phantom of Truth seems to be a member of the Dynasty in *The Repairer of Reputations* ("... the ramifications of the Imperial family, to Uoht and Thale, from Naotalba and Phantom of Truth, to Aldones ..."), while in *The Yellow Sign* the meaning is quite obscure ("... we had understood the mystery of the Hyades and the Phantom of Truth was laid.").

It seems likely that Chambers did not have any coherent mythical structure in mind, and no concrete concept of what constituted the play, aside from the generalities touched upon. Like an impressionistic painting it looks fine from a distance, but falls apart under close scrutiny.

Marion Zimmer Bradley makes some interesting observations about the possible origins of the "King in Yellow" mythology in her article "... And Strange Sounding Names" in *THE CONAN SWORDBOOK* (Mirage Press). She points out that Chambers was influenced by a new school of impressionistic writing common at that time in France and Spain, and that most of the stories in *THE KING IN YELLOW* can be translated stylistically into Spanish without shifting a word, while the idioms are French. She theorizes, then, that Chambers, intentionally or otherwise, used names in the stories relating to the "ghosts of the Pyrenees, the endless war between Moorish pagan and sternly tenacious Spain." Thus, Mrs. Bradley concludes that Casilda (sic) is a common name among Spanish women, Hastur is a probable corruption of Asturias (the only Spanish province that never surrendered to the Moors), Carcosa is a corruption of Carcassonne (an ancient French city formerly called Carcaso), and Hali is Arabic (Moorish influence in Spain) for the constellation of Taurus (which contains Aldebaran and the Hyades).

Of course, what Mrs. Bradley fails to note in this article is that with the exception of "Casilda", all of the aforementioned names were taken from Bierce. However, Bierce was a con-

temporary of Chambers, and may have been subject to Spanish influences himself.

After *THE KING IN YELLOW*, Chambers himself never did anything further to develop the mythology. There are only a few small hints in his later work of its existence. In *The Silent Land*, a borderline fantasy story following the title story in *THE MAKER OF MOONS*, there are two passing references to "a king in Carcosa" presented as snatches of a tale one of the characters is telling another. In *THE SLAYER OF SOULS*, a spy thriller written in 1920 (the year in which *The Repairer of Reputations* opens) we are again confronted with disembodied souls indistinguishable from flesh and blood people, as in *In the Court of the Dragon*. To make the point more obvious, Chambers introduced into the dialogue of the novel the line "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." This was the last line of *In the Court of the Dragon*. There is also some background borrowed from *The Maker of Moons*, which E.F. Bleiler considers to have been a preliminary version of it.

The real longevity of the King in Yellow mythology was due to its incorporation by other fantasy writers, long after Chambers himself had dropped the idea. H.P. Lovecraft was the first of these. It is often thought, in fact, that he got his idea for the NECRONOMICON from "The King in Yellow", however, nothing could be further from the truth. The fact is, Lovecraft's first mention of the NECRONOMICON was in *The Hound* written in 1922. He didn't know that *THE KING IN YELLOW* existed until he was finishing up his *Supernatural Horror in Literature* in 1927. Moreover, as we have seen, Chambers's fictitious play of blasphemous beauty hardly bears any resemblance to Lovecraft's mouldering old tome of unspeakable horrors and forbidden rites. But what Lovecraft did do was revive interest in Chambers's work. In *The Whisperer in Darkness* (1930), he incorporated some of Chambers's mythical names. It is the only story in which he did. Like Chambers, he never attached any particular meaning to the words he borrowed, but merely included them in a hodge-podge of other Cthulhu Mythos names. Thus in the story the protagonist tells us that he found himself faced with names and terms he "had heard elsewhere in the most hideous of connections... Nyarlathotep, Azathoth, Hastur, Yian, Leng, the Lake of Hali, Bethmoora, the Yellow Sign..." Later in the story we are told in a letter to the protagonist from his friend who has somehow become allied with a race of alien beings from Yuggoth, "... they (the beings from Yuggoth) have never knowingly harmed men... There is a whole secret cult of evil men (a man of your mystical erudition will understand me when I link them with Hastur and the Yellow Sign) devoted to the purpose of tracking them down and injuring them on behalf of monstrous powers from other dimensions." It is obvious from the context of the story that the beings from Yuggoth are sinister creatures in league with the rest of Lovecraft's Cthuluid pantheon. Since the second quotation turns out to be from one of them, it is unclear whether they are telling the truth about being at odds with the cults of evil men linked with Hastur and the Yellow Sign.

It was apparently this tangential reference to Hastur, however, that inspired August Derleth, Lovecraft's associate, to incorporate it into the Mythos as a relatively benign Great Old One constantly at battle with the rest of Lovecraft's evil pantheon. In 1932, Derleth, in collaboration with Mark Shorer, wrote *The Lair of the Star Spawn*. It is in this tale that Hastur makes its first appearance as a definable entity in the Mythos. We are told that "Hastur the Unspeakable" is an evil being in league with Cthulhu, *et. al.* When these beings were banished by the Elder Gods, Cthulhu was imprisoned in the sunken city of R'lyeh, and Hastur was "exiled to Hali in the

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Hyades." In 1939, Derleth further expanded the idea in *The Return of Hastur*. Here we find that Hastur is the half-brother of Cthulhu. The story tells us, "Hastur was hurled into outer space into that place where the black stars hang, which is indicated as Aldebaran of the Hyades, which is the place mentioned by Chambers, even as he repeats the Carcosa of Bierce." Derleth also throws in a few passing references to Aldones and Thale along the way, undoubtedly to help tie together the two mythologies.

Derleth was not the only one to take a liking to the name Hastur. Marion Zimmer Bradley, herself a Chambers fan, created her own concept of Hastur, unaware of what Derleth had been doing. In 1961, *THE SWORD OF ALCONES*, the first of her Darkover novels appeared, having as its hero a young man by the name of Regis Hastur. His family, the Hasturs, were "members of a ruling caste of telepathic families . . . ethereal serious, (and) virtuous," as Mrs. Bradley puts it herself in her *NYCTALOPS* No. 6 article.

In *THE SPAWN OF CTHULHU*, (Ballantine Books 1971), Lin Carter dredged up another example of Chambers's influence, from a 1938 issue of *WEIRD TALES*. It is a short poem by Vincent Staret, entitled *Cordelia's Song (from The King in Yellow)*. It is not a bad poem, and has an eerie atmosphere about it, but aside from the title there seems to be no connection to *THE KING IN YELLOW*. In the same volume, however, Carter himself has written a sonnet sequence emulating Lovecraft's *Fungi from Yuggoth*, entitled *Litany to Hastur*. Carter is quite adept at imitating the style of others, and in this sonnet sequence has achieved a subtly brilliant blend of the ideas and images of Chambers, Lovecraft and Derleth, in an atmosphere of unworldly horror.

The influence of *THE KING IN YELLOW* lives on. In 1967, Robert Silverberg opened his science fiction novel *THORNS* with the quotation from the beginning of *The Mask*. The ultimate in tributes to Chambers, however, must be conceded to James Blish. His short story *More Light* in Anne McCaffrey's anthology *ALCHEMY AND ACADEME* (Doubleday & Co. 1970) is a framework in which he presents us with the entire play "The King in Yellow" as supposedly written by Chambers himself. Allegedly, Chambers wrote up the play he had hinted at in his stories and sent a copy to Lovecraft, who in turn sent a copy to a young fan named Bill Atheling (Blish's pseudonym). The gist of the story is that for some mysterious reason, no one can read the entire play through.

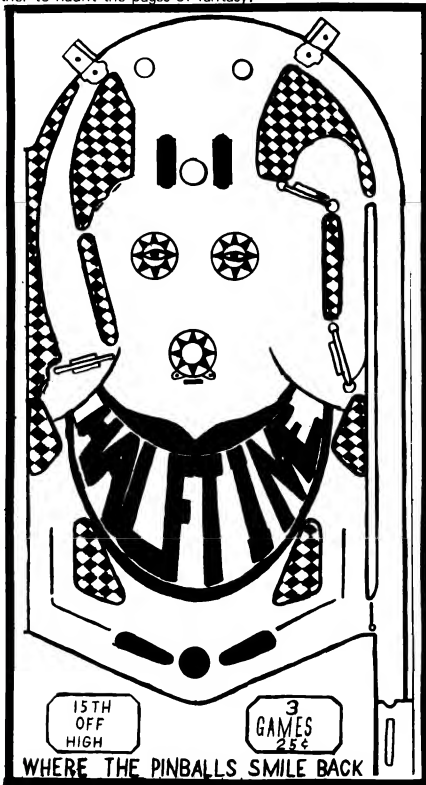
The Blish version of the play is quite clever, and manages to include quite a bit from Chambers's original stories, although it does fall short on a few important points. What we are presented with is a story of a pair of stagnating cities in the midst of an interminable siege. They are the cities of Hastur and Alar, and lie on the banks of the lakes Hali and Dehme (sic) respectively. With the exception of Carcosa, they are the only cities in Gondwanaland (This is the name of the theoretical land mass that broke apart to form our present continents). Carcosa is a strange ghostly city that seems to float by the far shore of Hali; it is the home of the King in Yellow. Into Hastur comes a strange figure in a pallid mask and wearing the Yellow Sign; he is Yhtill, the Phantom of Truth. He entices Cassilda, queen of Hastur, to end the siege by having the entire kingdom attend a masque, all wearing pallid masks to hide themselves from the King. The King retaliates by disintegrat-

ing Yhtill and permanently fixing the masks upon the faces of the people. The last lines echo Chambers in *The Mask*: "Not upon us, oh King, not upon us", which Alec remembers Cassilda crying, in his delirium.

Although he includes many such references and allusions throughout the body of the play, Blish seems to have overlooked the most obvious ones. *Cassilda's Song* and the opening quotation from *The Mask* are both cited by Chambers as being from Act 1 Scene 2 of the play, but Blish includes both in Act 2 of his version. And he totally disregards the line in *The Repairer of Reputations* that tells us of "Camilla's agonized scream and the awful words echoing through the dim streets of Carcosa . . . the last lines in the first act . . ." No such thing happens at the end of Blish's first act, or anywhere else, for Chambers has made it plain in this line that the action of the play is in Carcosa, not Hastur.

However, it is all in good fun. Blish has even managed to include the Whitman quote at the beginning of *The Maker of Moons* in the dialogue. And, of course, when the King himself appears, he advises the people of Hastur: "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the Living God!"

We now have had a close look at *THE KING IN YELLOW* itself, looked at its origins, and traced its varied influences to the present day. No doubt even if Chambers himself is someday forgotten, Hastur will still be around in one form or another to haunt the pages of fantasy.



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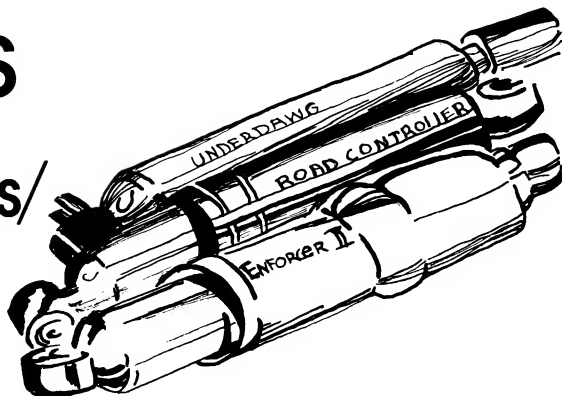


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WITH SECONDS TO SPARE

Eibert Lindsey

I was standing in one end of a long, dark hallway. At the other end was a square outline of light. I felt drawn to it, yet strangely afraid of it at the same time. I walked down the hall slowly.

Just a few feet away, I could tell it was the outline of a door. It had a small metal handle. I reached out to touch it. That was when the sound started. A strange wailing, sounding almost human. As my hand neared the door, the sound grew louder, more insistent. I felt as though someone were trying to warn me, and his words were just at the edge of intelligibility. The closer my hand came to the door, the more clear the voice became. I was just on the verge of touching the door, and just on the verge of understanding what the sound was when . . .

"When you woke up," Millie supplied.

"Right," I answered. "And I've had the same dream for the past five nights."

"Exactly the same? What do you suppose it means?" she asked.

"I don't know. Maybe I should see a psychiatrist."

"He'd just tell you that you hate your mother," she said, derisively.

"And he'd be right."

"Have you ever before had the same dream more than once?"

"No, and I don't mind saying, this has me a bit upset, not to mention tired."

"I doubt it will last much longer. These things have a way of clearing themselves up."

"I hope so." We stood and donned our coats. I paid the bill and we left. I looked at my watch.

"Are you going to make it on time?" Millie asked.

"I'll manage," I said.

"You never told me what it is you're going to."

"Winthrop invited me to a professor's lecture. Scotson is giving a talk on chronology and Winthrop said it was in my area."

"Well, I hope it's interesting. Thanks for the dinner," Millie said, as we arrived at her apartment.

"Thanks for listening to my troubles," I answered. "I hope you're right about the dream going away." I kissed her good-night at the doorstep.

After she closed the door, I checked my watch again. It was seven forty-five and I was due at the physics lab at eight.

I hurried across campus and arrived, breathless, a few moments late. I entered the large room and walked down the aisle to a seat close to the front. Professor Scotson was still in his opening remarks.

"... studies, as I'm sure many of you know. But for those twenty years I've never altered my basic position. And now I'm ready to prove that I was right."

I was familiar with most of Scotson's work. He had maintained that time travel was possible, although Revkim's Solution had later indicated otherwise. Though Scotson hadn't published in the last twenty years or so, it was common knowledge that he was constantly at work trying to validate his theoretical position.

"Rather than present a boring paper," Scotson continued, "which many of you will refuse to believe anyway, I have prepared a small demonstration which I am sure you will find extremely interesting." There was a low murmuring in the half-filled room. "Unfortunately," Scotson said, "the materials required for the demonstration were too large to bring with me, so I'm afraid we'll have to adjourn to my laboratory. I believe there will be enough room to accommodate us all."

Scotson stepped off the dais and made his way up one of the aisles. "If you will all follow me," he called, as he led the way out of the room. The small group rose and proceeded upstairs to Scotson's lab.

I fell in alongside Dr. Winthrop, who taught one of my graduate seminars and was chairman of the department.

"Hello, Mr. Williams," he said. "Glad to see you could make it."

"Hello, Dr. Winthrop."



"The other two students I invited apparently decided this talk wasn't worth their time."

His tone made me glad I had decided to come.

"What kind of demonstration does Professor Scotson have planned?"

Winthrop shook his head. "He's had the whole department guessing all week. He hasn't told anyone."

"Didn't you say it was in my area?"

Winthrop shook his head again. "Most of Scotson's previous work was in your area."

"It must be something pretty big, if he's been working on it for twenty years."

Winthrop laughed. "I doubt if he's only worked on one project in all that time. And speaking of that," he continued, "how is your research coming?"

"Not as well as I'd like. The roll-off values are a bit low. I think the LTM zone is too narrow."

"How will you correct that?" Winthrop asked.

"I thought I'd increase the aperture about three."

"You might want to consider a buckle replacement," he suggested.

"Replace the buckle?"

"A narrower buckle gives a higher Hertz value. That will increase your roll-off value."

We had reached the fourth floor and Scotson ushered us into his laboratory. Inside, in an area cleared of tables and equipment, a huge contraption sitting on four wooden supports almost touched the high ceiling.

The thing was basically rectangular, but at the top, in the center, was a large gap where a cushioned seat had been bolted in. A small panel consisting of a few buttons and several dials and gauges hung in front of the chair. A metal ladder welded to the front of the machine made it possible to climb up into the seat.

Scotson stood in front of the machine, holding a sheaf of papers. "These are copies of my latest work," he said, handing them out. "After the demonstration I hope they will answer most of your questions." Then he climbed the ladder and swung himself into the chair atop the machine.

"Those of you who know me and my work," he began, sur-

veying us from his throne, "may have already guessed that this is a time machine."

He paused. We were silent.

"You don't know how I have dreamed of this moment. For years I've worked in this lab, first studying Brenn's equations, examining his assumptions and grappling with his theory. Then I toiled over Revkim's Solution, making new assumptions, replacing his values, constructing a whole new framework of time.

"Then, after six years of research and painstaking calculations, I worked to validate my theory. First, I performed experiments to strengthen my grasp of the physical correlations to the theoretical base I had developed.

"Then, when I thought I had a firm base to work from, I went on to design and construct a prototype of my time machine. It was much smaller than this and used far less power. I sent it forward into time, first for a few moments, then for a half hour. But that wasn't enough and so for the last three years I worked on a larger version. I had to experience it myself. I had to feel what it was like to actually travel through time. Can you imagine? Can anyone imagine what it is like?"

"It'll be the first to know, the first man in history to experience moving through time. My name shall be recorded with Einstein and Brenn. It will overshadow Revkim!" He stopped abruptly, and smiled.

"I'm sorry, gentlemen. I trust you will forgive my getting carried away like that. As I said, I have waited a long time."

Scotson pressed some buttons on the small control panel in front of him. The machine slowly hummed to life.

"Now for the proof. I plan to transfer myself through time to a point two days in the future, that would be Thursday night. I'll remain twenty to thirty minutes, long enough to purchase a few papers to document my visit. Are there any questions at this point?"

Professor Johnson stepped forward. "I have a question. How did you change Revkim's Solution?"

"Yes," someone agreed. "What did you do to the matrix?"

"You've actually had a prototype travel through time!" someone else said.

"Why are you going to be gone a half hour? Why can't you return a split-second after you left?"

"How much power—"

"Please, gentlemen!" Scotson interrupted. "All of your questions are answered in my report. Except yours, Stilman. I won't return a split-second after I left because the adjustments for controlling progress through time are awkward to make. If I leave the settings alone I'll be able to return back through the same amount of time that I originally travelled forward through. That means that if I stay in the future a half hour, I will return to a half hour from the time I left.

"Now, will you please step away from the machine?" Scotson asked. "Five feet is quite adequate. There is a little torque field overlay." He waited until the people closest to the machine had stepped back several paces. "After I've left please don't touch the supports below the machine. I trust I will see you in half an hour." He threw a small red switch on the panel. The machine emitted a shrill sound for a second and then it seemed to fade slowly, becoming translucent and hazy. Suddenly, it was gone.

There was a stunned silence.

"He really did it!" Johnson said.

"I don't believe it."

"It's amazing."

I turned to Winthrop. He was looking at the report he held in his hand. He flipped it open and began skimming.

Several people went forward to the spot where the machine

My Back Pages



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IF HE HADN'T GONE INTO THE FUTURE, WHERE HAD HE GONE?



had stood and walked around it in disbelief. The lower portion of the wooden supports was all that remained.

Another professor came over to Winthrop. "What do you make of it, Ed?"

"I'm not sure. He's changed Revkim's calculations."

"So I noticed," the other man agreed. "It looks like some terms have been completely left out."

"Look here!" exclaimed Winthrop, pointing to a paragraph in Scotson's paper.

I craned my neck to see which page they were on.

"He assumed time is made up of discrete units occurring in a five dimensional construct whereas Revkim assumed that time was a continuous wave in four dimensions," Winthrop explained.

"Yes," the other man agreed. He flipped to the next page. "Apparently several terms cancel. It makes the whole equation simpler."

"Occam's razor at work, do you suppose?"

"Well, nature seems to agree with Scotson," the other man commented, waving toward the space once occupied by the machine.

Winthrop flipped a couple more pages of Scotson's report. "When you change Revkim's calculations and plug the values in, the matrix comes out to unity instead of zero."

"Why, that changes the whole calculation!"

"Hey!" someone exclaimed. "It's been about twenty-five minutes."

"He should be back any time."

"God! There'll be no living with him now. He'll be so damn famous it won't be funny."

Another man laughed. "Don't worry, Tom! You won't have to put up with him. They're sure to move him out of that hole you call an office!" Several professors chuckled.

Everyone was silent after that as we waited. The tension grew as the minutes passed and Scotson did not return. Someone coughed.

"It's been forty-five minutes," Johnson announced.

"Do you suppose something went wrong?"

"Let's give him fifteen more minutes," Winthrop suggested.

At the end of that time, Scotson had still not arrived.

"Alright, gentlemen," Winthrop began, "I think it's time to assume that something has gone awry with Scotson's experiment. Let me suggest a course of action.

"We'll notify campus security. They can post a guard to keep people out and to watch for Scotson's return. Then I suggest we move to the Chronology Department's lounge and try to figure out what went wrong with Scotson's experiment."

"I'm still trying to figure out what went right!" someone interjected. Several people laughed and the tension eased.

Winthrop turned to me. "Will you notify Security?" he asked.

"What do I say? They'll think it's a prank."

"Hmmm. Alright. I'll handle that. You just keep your mouth shut. Anyone finds out about this and I'll know who is to blame," he added, with a grin.

"Sure."

"Alright. Then I'll see you tomorrow."

"Well—" I had wanted to go to the lounge with them and follow the discussion, but perhaps I would just be a nuisance, "—okay," I said.

I left the building and walked out into the cold evening. It felt good to inhale the crisp autumn air, after being in the stuffy laboratory.

I thought over the events that had spanned the last hour and a half. I had just witnessed the incredible and my mind refused to grasp all of it. I walked home with my thoughts whirling. How could Scotson travel through time? Why hadn't he returned? If he hadn't gone into the future, where had he gone?

Slowly, a few things seemed to come together. I began to see what might have gone wrong with the experiment. By the time I reached home I was certain I knew why Scotson had failed. I took my copy of his report to my desk and tried to follow his theory in order to confirm my idea. But his formulations were too complex, his prose too dry, and I grew tired. I soon gave up and climbed into bed, where I fell into a fitful slumber.

I was standing in one end of a long, dark hallway. At the other end was a square outline of light. I felt drawn to it, yet strangely afraid at the same time. I walked down the hall slowly.

Just a few feet from it, I could tell it was the outline of a door. I reached out to touch it. That was when the strange wailing sound started. As my hand got closer to the door, the sound grew louder, as though someone was trying to warn me. The sound was just at the edge of intelligibility. As my hand approached the door, the voice seemed clearer. I stopped and listened intently, straining. But the more I strained, the less clear the voice became.

My hand reached toward the door. I touched the cold metal handle. The voice grew louder, clearer, overwhelming.

"Stop! I won't let you . . ."



Every muscle was tense. My forehead was beaded with sweat. Gently, ever so gently, I tugged on the metal handle.

"I won't let you."

The door swung easily open . . .

"Stop!"

The next morning, I dragged myself out of bed, trying to push the dream which had kept me tossing all night into the back of my mind.

I dressed and had a quick breakfast, then walked over to Winthrop's office. I wanted to find out what had been decided and, of course, to present the theory I had developed the evening before.

He was busy and I had to wait a half hour. But as soon as he found out that I was waiting, he made time for me to see him.

"Have a seat," he offered. "You didn't discuss what happened with anyone, did you?"

I shook my head.

"Well, our discussion last night lasted several hours, but none of us could come up with anything. That's not surprising, of course. We don't really understand what Scotson's machine does or even the theory Scotson developed.

"As I think someone mentioned last night, we don't know what he did right, much less what went wrong."

I cleared my throat. "I, uh, had a thought last night." It occurred to me that I was probably making a fool of myself. How could I possibly come up with the right answer when the top professors in the Chronology Department had failed? I felt my resolve slowly slipping away.

"Yes?" Winthrop prompted.

"Well, isn't it possible that Scotson forgot to take into account the movement of the Earth through space? Since the Earth is not only spinning on its axis, but revolving around the Sun, and the Sun at the same time is heading toward, er, some star—well, anyway, by tomorrow the Earth will be millions of miles away."

Winthrop nodded. "That's a good point. I say that because that's the first thing we thought of. Somehow, and none of us understands how, the machine automatically takes care of that."

"The machine takes care of it?"

"I'm sorry. I'm not making myself clear today. I didn't get much sleep last night," Winthrop apologized.

"The machine is already moving with the same velocity as the Earth," he explained. "The equation indicates that this velocity is somehow maintained when it travels through time. That is to say, the machine will end up at a place equivalent to where it would have ended up if it had simply sat where it was for two days instead of moving forward in time."

"That doesn't make sense," I objected.

"Mathematically, it works out beautifully. If you think about it for a moment, you'll see it's not so hard to accept. The machine is simply accelerated along the temporal axis proportionately to the distance, if you will, it is travelling through time. In fact, we suspect that this will provide an upper limit to how far one can travel backward and forward in time."

"How so?" I hadn't quite followed that.

"The machine's velocity can be increased only up to the speed of light. At least, that's the theory."

I nodded, though I still didn't grasp entirely what Winthrop was saying.

"If you really want something to think about," Winthrop offered, "try this.

"Someone, I think Dr. Pearson, suggested that perhaps Scotson has sort of 'crashed into' himself. His machine is sitting in his laboratory Thursday evening. A hazy form coalesces around it. Then there's God knows what—a huge explosion perhaps—as his machine from the past tries to occupy the same space at the same time as the machine in the future."

"Do you think that's what happened?"

"Well, there's a major problem with it. As a matter of fact, it's a good example of the time traveller's nemesis, the paradox."

I thought for a moment; then it dawned on me. "Of course. If Scotson left the past with his machine and didn't return, because of the explosion, then his machine wouldn't be sitting there when he arrived, so there would be no explosion. And since there is no explosion, then there is no reason not to return—"

"Exactly," said Winthrop, holding up his hand to stop the torrent. "So we're right back where we started."

"But I thought—that is, Scotson hasn't returned. Doesn't that mean that his machine is a failure somewhere along the line?"

Winthrop thought a moment. "Since you were in on this from the beginning," he said finally, "I don't think anyone will mind if I tell you this."

"What?" My curiosity was burning. What had they really decided?

"Well, it's not a whole lot," Winthrop said, sensing my eagerness. "In fact, it's the only thing we could come up with. We're going to meet tomorrow night. If he ever made it, we'll be there waiting for him. If you'd like to join us, I don't think anyone will object."

"Tomorrow? What time?"

"We'll be meeting here, at my office, about 7:45, then walk over to Scotson's lab."

"I'll be here. Thanks."

"Sure."

"Why do you think Scotson went through that whole development process on his own?"

"I suspect there were several reasons for that," Winthrop offered, after a moment of consideration. "Scotson had quite a name in Chronology before Revkim published his solution to Brenn's equations. Perhaps, he wanted to regain that fame by developing the time machine."

"But wouldn't publishing that paper that he handed out have accomplished that?"

"When he lost his fame, he lost a lot of his confidence. I think, basically, he was afraid he might be proven wrong. After all, he made several untested assumptions in the course of his calculations: that time consists of discrete units in a five-dimensional construct, that continuum resistance would remain negligible at large velocity with large mass, and several other minor ones."

"Did you know him pretty well?"

"We had a lot of professional contact before he lost his fame. Then he retreated into his work almost entirely." Winthrop paused for a moment. Then, looking at the papers on his desk, he said, "I'm afraid you've caught me at a busy time."

I nodded. "I'll see you tomorrow, then."

"Right."

I headed over to my laboratory to do some work of my own. Brooding about Scotson's experiment made it difficult to concentrate, but I had to do a little catching up, since my recurrent dream had been interfering with my work lately.

When I thought I'd accomplished enough to call it a day, I found that it was very late. I went home tired, but didn't sleep well. I had the dream again.

The next afternoon I walked over to Millie's apartment. She let me in and offered me some coffee.

"No, thanks."

"Well, I'm going to have some," she said, putting water on to boil. "Was Scotson's speech very interesting?"

I started. "Scotson's talk was just the usual stuff. Nothing spectacular." I knew she'd kill me when she found out differently.

"You didn't tell Winthrop that, did you?"

"Of course not. I told him I felt it was an extremely inspiring educational experience."

"I'm sure," she laughed.

"How about your dreams?" she asked. "Still having them?"

"That's what I wanted to tell you about. The dream changed."

"Oh? How do you mean?"

"There's more to it now."

She sat down on the couch next to me, a cup of coffee in her hand. "Tell me about it."

I related the dream as well as I could remember it. As I finished, she said, "And you wake up before the door gets all the way open?"

"This voice keeps yelling 'Stop,' the whole time," I said. "That's what's really eerie."

"Maybe you really should see a psychologist. He might be able to help you understand what's causing this."

"You think so?"

"It couldn't hurt, could it?" She looked at me. "I mean, it's not a question of you being insane or anything."

"I guess I could drop by the medical building."

"I'll come with you if you like."

"Thanks, but I don't see any point really."

"Moral support."

"You've already supplied that." I kissed her. "I feel better, just talking about it and coming to a decision."

"I'm glad to hear it."

We let it drop and turned to other subjects. Then I did have a cup of coffee. Finally, I had to leave for an afternoon class.

I went through the rest of the afternoon mechanically, impatient for the evening meeting with Winthrop.

When 7:30 finally arrived and we were all assembled, we proceeded to Scotson's laboratory in the physics building across the street. Winthrop figured Scotson would arrive around 8:15.

We all waited expectantly, silently, as though a sound would disrupt the time continuum, making it impossible for Scotson to arrive.

Finally, a hazy form appeared.

"Look!"

"He made it!"

Its outline became stronger. Abruptly, the machine solidified and became real.

Scotson was seated on top of it. "What . . . what happened?" He seemed disoriented. I realized that he couldn't tell whether he had travelled through time or not. The room probably looked pretty much the same now as when he had left, several "seconds" before.

"It worked, Professor Scotson," I told him. "It's Thursday."

A broad smile covered his face. "I knew it would work," he said. "I knew it would." A tenseness seemed to leave him, as he switched his machine off.

He chuckled. "It never occurred to me that you'd all be

waiting for me. It's so obvious."

Winthrop stepped forward "I offer congratulations from the Chronology Department, Professor Scotson."

"Thank you," Scotson beamed.

"However," Winthrop continued, "I'm afraid your experiment wasn't a total success."

"Wha—! What do you mean, not a total success?"

"You never came back last Tuesday. You left, but you never returned."

Scotson looked at Winthrop strangely, as though trying to grasp what the other was saying. "Never returned?" he repeated.

"I'm sure there is a simple explanation," Winthrop continued. "Why don't you climb down—"

"NO!" Scotson's voice raged. "You're not going to cheat me out of my victory. Twenty years! Twenty long years I worked for this moment. My machine works! It works!"

Winthrop was surprised by Scotson's reaction, but he tried to calm him. "Of course your machine works. We all saw that. You have successfully travelled forward. It's simply that you didn't return."

"Of course I didn't return. I haven't left yet."

"I'm speaking of Tuesday evening. You never returned Tuesday evening. That is in the past. You never returned."





"But my machine works," Scotson struggled with the idea Winthrop was presenting. He hadn't returned. His machine had failed. He had failed.

I could almost see Scotson's mind turning, twisting, struggling to escape the grip of Winthrop's words. Perhaps it twisted too far.

"You're jealous," Scotson accused. "Yes, that's it, you're jealous of my machine. You feel foolish because all this time you thought Revkim was right. And now I've proved him wrong. But you want to stop me. You want everyone to laugh at me again. It won't work! Not this time."

"Dr. Scotson, be reasonable," Winthrop tried again. "No one wants to cover this up. We know what you've done. We—"

"Yes, you know. I was a fool to show you my machine. I should never have trusted you. Well, I'm going back, and you can't stop me."

Winthrop tried another tack. "You misunderstood me, Professor Scotson. We simply don't want you to take any chances. We know what a great man you are, and what marvelous work you've done. We wouldn't want you to get hurt unnecessarily."

"Do you think I need a pipsqueak like you to tell me my talents?" Scotson roared. "I know how great I am. Do you

think anyone else had the talent to conceive my theory, much less apply it? Who? Not Revkim!" He spat the name. "He's nothing but a theoretician who doesn't know a Sebring coil from his ass. And yet everyone looked up to him all those years."

Then a new gleam came into Scotson's eye. He laughed, full and heartily. "All those years," he repeated. "But I've got the power now. Yes. I can change all that." He looked down at his machine, gloating. Then he glared at Winthrop and the others. "Suppose Revkim never solved his precious equation. What if I presented my theory instead and had a working model to back it up?" He laughed again, and pushed the buttons that brought the machine humming to life.

I realized that they would never succeed in talking Scotson out of trying to return, and so I decided to try an idea of my own. While Scotson's attention was directed toward the professors trying to dissuade him, I walked cautiously around to the back of the machine.

I studied the rear of Scotson's machine. Then I found what I was seeking, a square panel set in the back of the machine, with a small metal handle. There was something odd . . .

At the front of the machine, Winthrop had given up trying to reason with Scotson. "Get him!" Winthrop shouted, as he tried to scramble up the ladder. Scotson kicked at him with his foot.

"We've got to stop him before the thing warms up," Winthrop yelled. Several of the men rushed to the machine.

"I knew it. You're all jealous! I won't let you stop me." Scotson's foot connected with Winthrop's jaw; a glancing blow which sent Winthrop sprawling to the floor.

"I won't let you," Scotson cackled. "I won't let you."

My hand was just reaching out to touch the panel. I heard Scotson yelling in protest. Then I knew. The panel. The voice. The dream.

"Get away. Stop! I won't let you."

I stood transfixed. My hand moved of its own accord. I grasped the cold metal handle and . . .

"Stop!"

The door swung gently open. Inside were cables and wires making hundreds of electrical connections.

"Get away!" I heard Winthrop's voice as though from far away. "The torque field overlay! He's going to throw the switch!"

I reached into the panel box and yanked dozens of wires loose, as Scotson pressed the last button.

I stepped back, frightened, as sparks shot from the wires. The lights flickered out and for a moment the sparks provided the only illumination. Then there was a small explosion inside the machine, and I heard Scotson scream. His body gave off an eerie yellow glow which filled the room. He screamed again as his clothes dissolved and fell away from him. Scotson stood, screaming, his body glowing even brighter. Suddenly, he was gone and the yellow light with him.

ARTHUR RIMBAUD VISITS COLUMBUS, OHIO

Akron Moore

**the plainscape hovers along
rivers on a buffet table of
boots and salads.**

**tenements (filled with type-
writers with legs crossed)
needle up to the ceiling.**

**hysterical horses witness
wheels roll off auto axles
at rush hour.**

**academy mice drink blood and piss
in bars and labs and climb
walls of the arena and sweat.**

**frightened sundials hide in
the shade as the bored clock
in the tower scratches its
jaundiced face with its
bald hands.**

**briefcases carry umbrellas
past an assassinated statue
while flags and bottles
convene at the crucifix.**

**flannel flashlights cry blindly
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There was another muffled explosion from the machine, and smoke began to fill the room. A fire started, spreading quickly in the lab. Seconds later, the building's fire alarm sounded. For a moment no one moved. Then Simpson and another professor ran into the hall, returning momentarily with fire extinguishers. Several others retrieved extinguishers from other floors and joined them in fighting the blaze. But it was hopeless. The flames slowly drove us from the laboratory. Scotson's machine was lost.

Firemen finally arrived and we evacuated the building. We watched as they worked to control the blaze. I walked over to Winthrop.

"I didn't mean for anything to happen, Dr. Winthrop. I wanted to stop him. He might have caused a lot of trouble if he had gone back. I just meant to stop him."

"There didn't seem to be much else we could do, Mr. Williams," he said gravely. "You did the right thing."

"Thanks." That made me feel a little better. "What—what do you suppose happened—I mean to Professor Scotson?"

"I don't know," Winthrop answered, touching his sore jaw tenderly. "Perhaps, thousands of years from now, when time travel is understood, someone will find him, ageless, filled with rage, claiming he's been cheated out of immortality."

I didn't answer, not sure if Winthrop was serious. We watched the firemen till the blaze was almost extinguished, then I headed home to get some rest.

I thought of the ironic role my dream had played. My subconscious knew what was going to happen and tried to warn me. But that very warning had almost prevented me from stopping Scotson.

At my apartment, I undressed quickly and went straight to bed, glad it was all over.

I was standing in one end of a long, dark hallway. At the other end was a square outline of light. It was a door. I reached out to touch the cold metal handle. The strange sound started. It formed words.

"You will share my fate, Williams!"

I stopped, staring at the door, not comprehending. There was something I was supposed to do.

"You will soon be with me. You can't escape."

My forehead was beaded with sweat. My fingers closed around the handle and pulled. The door swung open and I saw—

Scotson's face!

When I woke I was still trembling. I sat up and reached for the light switch. Somehow, I felt better with it on.

I got out of bed and sat at my desk, leaning on my typewriter. Scotson was gone God-knows-where and his machine had been destroyed in the fire. It was over. Why the dream? What did it mean?

I still don't know as I sit here typing this, afraid to sleep. I keep thinking of that voice in the dream, threatening me, taunting me.

But now I hear his voice while I am awake. It comes to me even while I type. God! I'm scared.

"You will share my fate, Williams! You will soon be with me," it threatens.

I feel like I'm losing control. The strain has been too much. Just got to keep typing. Get my mind off it. God, I can hear him now. He's coming for me. His voice is getting louder. His voice

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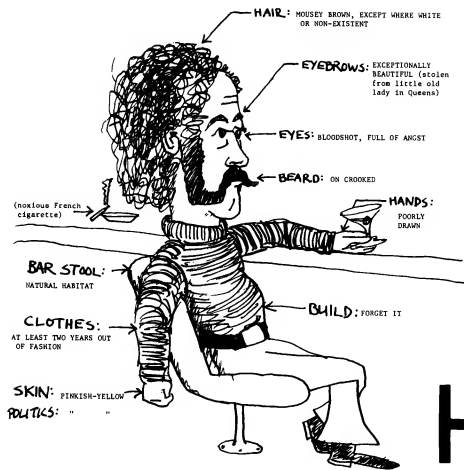
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HAVE YOU SEEN THIS MAN?



(LOCK UP YOUR DAUGHTERS!)

This interview was recorded at MidwestCon in Cincinnati on June 27th, 1976. The Starwind staff situated Joe Haldeman on the patio behind the con suite and talked with him for about three hours. During this time several people pulled up chairs and joined our group. Some of their remarks are included along with the "official" Starwind questions. The talk is reproduced more or less verbatim, with a minimum amount of editing. Unfortunately, there was not enough space to include the entire discussion.

I'd like to acknowledge Georgia Mase's help in transcribing a large part of the interview and in typing the final copy.

And of course, special thanks to Joe Haldeman.

—Elbert Lindsey, Jr.

STARWIND: Well, I thought I'd start out with the usual "how-did-you-get-your-start" question.

HALDEMAN: Oh, a "how-did-I-get-my-start" question. Well, I always wrote, you know. I started writing about when I started reading. But I mostly wrote poetry when I was just writing for fun. Writing short stories wasn't any fun; I never finished them. I'd get a neat idea and I'd start writing a story and then, when it got hard, I stopped. Like I had, oh, a couple of dozen beginnings.

What really did it for me, I had three extra hours of electives, my senior year in college. I was a physics major, and I didn't want to take any more math, didn't want to take any more physics; I wanted to take something that was easy. So I asked my advisor whether I could take a course in creative writing, and he looked at me kind of sideways and said, "Go ahead, it's your life." So I took it and I wrote three stories during that semester and sold two of them. And decided it was better than working for a living.

But actually, it wasn't that simple. I wrote them in '67 and then was drafted as soon as I got my Bachelor's degree. They hauled me off, and then two years later, I hadn't gotten out of the Army, but I'd gotten back from overseas. I was allowed a station near where I lived so I could commute to the Army, which is much nicer than being in the Army. And I found these stories. I had never sent them out or anything—No, no, par-

"I've been extremely lucky and I don't kid myself. I'm not science fiction's answer to Truman Capote or anything like that."

starwind INTERVIEWS JOE HALDEMAN

don me. I *did* send them out to ANALOG and Campbell rejected them so I just didn't send them out to anywhere else. Then I sent them to GALAXY and Jakobsson bought one—actually, Fred Pohl bought it. That was when Fred was leaving and Jakobsson was the one who wrote the checks. But it was a real revelation, that you could get paid for that. But ever since then . . . you know, I was telling a guy this morning, I only have one story in seven years that I haven't sold, so I think—I don't know, I never practiced consciously, but obviously, I wrote about a half a million words before I settled down to serious writing. Nature and nurture you know—I guess some people are born with a talent for it and so they practice whether they set out to do so or not.

S: Was there any particular reason you picked SF?

H: Oh, it's the same reason as most people. It was what I always read. So that's what I wrote when I sat down to write. In fact, the one short story I haven't sold is not science fiction.

S: How do you develop a story? How do you get an idea for a story?

H: I don't know. The ideas are floating around. I normally don't consciously sit down and say I'm going to write a story about what it feels like to be a rusty robot. I start out with people. I try to make somebody who is interesting to me. And that person generates the story. When I'm just writing *ad lib*, that's what happens. As it stands right now, the only short work I do, I do on assignment. Like Ben Bova will call up and say, "I'd like a 5,000 word story about the scientific method, pro or con." And so I will do those things, just kind of as a challenge or as a favor. There's no money in short story writing so I don't write short stories, except in strange circumstances. That's kind of appalling. I like to write short stories, but it takes me a long time to do a short story and you top out at seven cents a word. The book I'm writing now, I'm getting 33 cents a word for it, so there's just no contest.

S: I can see that. When you write, do you just follow the character along and see what happens?

H: Yeah. Right now, with having written, what, eight or nine books and 50 short stories, I trust my characters. They'll find a story for me.

S: Do you do a lot of rewriting?

H: I don't rewrite at all. No, I rewrite on the typewriter, essentially; that is, I'll say the sentence over and over and when it sounds right, I type it down.

I'm a very slow writer. I figured out last year my average was about eight hundred words a day. That's about two and a half pages. Two pages is a decent day, I don't complain. If I get four pages, I'm really ecstatic. And some days, you know, well, like you're writing a story and you come to a place where most of it is dialog or action and I can pound out ten pages—really, that makes my week. Right now I'm working a double shift because I've got 5 books to write. Normally, I write from about 3 in the morning to about 10; so now what I'm doing, I'm writing from about 5 in the morning to noon and then I take off a couple of hours and then I go back to it in the afternoon. I've got a lot of deadlines to meet.

S: Are you having any problems "drying up" when you do that?

H: No. I do the serious writing in the morning and I signed up for two Star Trek books, and I do those in the afternoon. That's putting on a different hat. It's a different kind of writing.

S: Your novel, *THE FOREVER WAR*, was published in several segments originally. Did you write it in several segments or did you write it as a novel which you broke up?

H: Well, I didn't start out to write a novel. As a matter of fact, I know exactly the minute and the second when I started the book. I was at Keith Laumer's house down in Florida. And he and my wife had gone grocery shopping, which is a project because he lives out in the middle of nowhere, you know—they drove into town. And I had my typewriter set up on his dining room table and I remembered a line, a stupid line. When I was in basic training we'd been out on night combat maneuvers in the dead of winter and we were frozen to the bone and everything, and they herded us into this shed. It was just as cold as the outside, and we're sitting there at midnight and this clown comes up on the stage and says, "Tonight, I'm going to show you eight silent ways to kill a man." And everybody goes, "Aw, shit! It's going to take a long time for him to teach us those eight silent ways." In fact, most of them were rather noisy and most of them didn't work. But that line stuck in my head, so I just sat down and typed out that line and I started writing the story from that line. And by the time I'd written 2 or 3 pages, I knew it was going to be a book. But not being a big name, I knew that if I just wrote the book, I couldn't get it serialized. So I decided to write an episodic novel, that is, one that broke down easily into novelettes, so I could sell the novelettes independently. And as a matter of fact, I'd written ¾ of the book before I got a buyer. I went to 19 publishers who rejected it before St. Martin's bought it. There's a lesson here for all of us, you know, it's one of the best-selling science fiction books of the past several years, and yet nobody would pick it up.

S: Well, it's harder to get books published, I suppose.

H: Well, you know, it shouldn't be that hard. But there were 792 science fiction titles last year. And most of them were turkeys. Most of them were unreadable. And it frustrates me. You know, every now and then I teach writing, either at Clarion or at a university or something like that, and I have students who write well and who are doing better stuff than I see published. There's a huge luck factor. Now, you hit the editor at the right time, he's feeling good, he says, "Well, this is readable," and he buys it. I've been extremely lucky and I don't kid myself. I'm not science fiction's answer to Truman Capote or anything like that. But, I've been very lucky. You know, you just have to sell a few stories and you get a track record; people know your name, editors know your name. And when a manuscript comes in with your name on it, they say, "Well, this is gonna be competent." And they have a mindset; they're disposed to buy it before they read a word. Whereas you come in from left field, from Oshkosh, and they say, "Well, who's this turkey?"

S: You've just won the Nebula, and your novel is up for the Hugo. Do you think either one of these awards is more prestigious than the other?

H: My own opinion. . . . If I were to buy a book on the basis of awards, the Hugo means a lot more to me just by track record. If you put a stack of all the Hugo award winners here, and a stack of all the Nebula award winners here, there are a lot more good books in the Hugo stack. The Nebula is affected by all sorts of things that, to me, have nothing to do with whether a book is good. If the book is audacious, ambitious in a literary sense, it has a good chance at the Nebula, even if it's unreadable. Which is proper. You know, I don't . . . I'm not kicking it, because the Nebula is a bunch of writers giving a prize to somebody who's a good writer. But that doesn't mean it's a good book in terms of enjoyment. When I read

"We're sitting there at midnight and this clown comes up on the stage and says, 'Tonight, I'm going to show you eight silent ways to kill a man.'"

science fiction, I read it strictly for enjoyment, it's light literature. And when something is more than that, that's great, but it doesn't have to be any more than that. I don't know. I was surprised that I won the Nebula, because I was up against DHALGREN. Well, DHALGREN was one hell of an ambitious book. You know, I got bored reading it. But I did read it, and it sticks with me the way not too many science fiction books do. I mean, a hell of a project. And I appreciate what he did, and I would have voted for it if I hadn't been on the ballot.

S: One of your other novels, *WAR YEAR*, is about a 19-year old in Viet Nam. Is that autobiographical in any sense?

H: In a very strict sense it is. The places he goes and the things he does all happened to me or to people in my platoon. And the places, the sequence of action is mixed-up for dramatic unity, so it's not a historical record of that year in the Central Highlands. But, except for the sequence, it's absolutely true. I was trying to write a thing that was in between a novel and journalism, and I think I failed in that sense. Finally, I had to make up the ending. Because nothing had happened that was neat enough to close the book up. So I had to make up that. It was something that I'd heard about happening, but I kind of doubt that it actually did happen. Soldiers lie a lot.

I got the contract because of Ben Bova, who had written a bunch of books for young adults, with Holt, Rinehart & Winston. I was at Milford in 1970 and talking to Ben one morning. I told him that I had this idea for a book about Viet Nam. And he said, "Well, why don't you write it as a young adult book?" You know, a book for teenagers, because teenagers should know, just as kind of counter-propaganda to all this flag-waving bullshit, the "let the Marines make you a man," and everything. A lot of people believe that. And so you want to hit kids who are 14, 15 and . . . and detoxify them early. I thought that was a reasonable thing to do, so I wrote up a chapter and an outline and Ben sent a letter to Holt, Rinehart and Winston and said when this thing comes in you ought to look at it, because this guy's a really great writer and a buddy and all that. And they bought it. And they asked me to do it for what they called the Pacesetter Series. They wanted . . . it's a beautiful idea. They wanted books on adult themes that were written in a simple style with simple vocabulary so they could reach inner-city people, adults who are learning how to read in adult education classes. So I gave them this. So it's full of "mother-fucker" and "bullshit" and all that, and yet it's a very simple, easy-to-read book. The Pacesetter Series fell through, and they printed it just as a novel. In fact, half of the ones they printed are under a juvenile grouping, and all the reviewers got the first printing, so they all have this, you know, "Ages Twelve and Up," and that's an easy handle for a reviewer to get. "I don't want my kids to read this bullshit." So it got odd reviews, but it got very good reviews. The New York Times gave it a full page, which is odd for a first



novel, and weird for a juvenile novel. It never went over; absolutely never made a penny.

S: It's hard to find copies of it. I tried to get one from the library so I could read it. . . .

H: Yeah. I guess they printed 5000 copies and sold 4200 of them, and I bought the remaining 800. I've got 'em sitting around, like furniture in my living room; these boxes of books are going to follow me for the rest of my life. But I wouldn't let them sell it to Marlborough Books or something. So I've been selling them. I put an ad in LOCUS. I guess we've sold about a hundred copies of it.

S: How much is it?

H: I'm selling them for the cover price, \$4.50, even though they cost me a good deal less, but, you know, I've got to be realistic about making my investment back. It's kind of a pain, really, because I'm not a book-seller, and my wife is taking care of it. You know, the letters come in and she mails them off and everything. And I've had . . . I don't mean to be making a plug for my sideline. "Used Books." "Nebula Winner and Huckster."

S: Would you like to talk a little bit about the O'Neill plan and the L-5 Society?

H: Yes, uh. . .

S: You mentioned it in "Tricentennial." [ANALOG, July, 1976]

H: I did but . . . you know, that's odd, because I wrote the story from the cover. Ben called me, said, "I've got this great cover painting from Rick Sternbach; would you like to write a story about it?" and I said, "Sure," and, you notice, if you hold it

"I entertain myself at the typewriter . . . This ether in the air is telling me a story, and I go to the typewriter to find out what happened today."

upside down, there's the North American nebula. Now, that's what the story was about. Rick sent me a xerox of this picture. And I took out my calipers and measured it, and oh, Jesus! It's supposed to be taking place a hundred years from now, and to have the North American Nebula look like that it's gotta be almost 3000 light years away. So, that kind of generated the story. And then, he put a hole in the spaceship, so I had to have the spaceship hit by something. But the . . . it was funny because I didn't know that Norm's article on L-5 was in that issue, too. But I just joined the L-5 Society, and I had been thinking a lot about it, and so I put them on L-5 in the story — just an odd coincidence. As a matter of fact, you know this . . . were you at Marcon?

S: Yes.

H: The speech I gave there, the L-5 Society is using . . . They have a speaker's package that they send out to people who want to talk. And I sent them the text of that speech, and they xeroxed it and that's their nucleus now.

S: Do you think the O'Neill plan has a chance of succeeding?

H: I doubt it. It's worthwhile . . . It's worthwhile in a social sense. If they don't put one gram of material in orbit, which I think is quite likely, it at least gives you a position to look at the problems we have in a global sense. And it's a game plan that could conceivably work. And just to get people thinking — it's very worthwhile for that.

Now, I'm writing a book about it and sort of taking the position that, well, it could work — let's close our eyes and pretend that we could put together two hundred and fifty billion dollars and do this, then what would happen. But I've got to be a little bit cynical. The book has to be honest. I don't

see any way in hell that you can get an American politician to instigate legislation that won't come to fruition for a quarter of a century. They just don't think that way. Anything that doesn't bear on their getting re-elected is pie-in-the-sky to them. And it's sad, but it's a fact of life. I think if L-5 does come to pass it'll probably be Europe or Russia that does it, or the Arab Republic, because they can think in those terms. I have this scenario to kind of twist people's paranoia. Iran has enough money to put the satellite up, to put up solar power generating satellites, and it would allow them to keep a hammer-lock on the energy industry. There's only a finite amount of petroleum, and when that's gone, they're not going to be rich any more. So, if they want to stay rich, they should only put up the generating stations in orbit and then they would have a strangle-hold on the world's economy in perpetuity, because the sun is not going to go out. And I should only tell them, you know. . . .

S: In your story "Tricentennial" there's an animosity between the people on L-5 and the Earth. Do you think that would be a natural development?

H: I think it would be. Okay, you start out, you've got this big space colony up in orbit and, at first at least, they really depend on the Earth. The earth has to send them hydrogen to make water so that they can drink. The earth has to send them carbon just so that they can grow food. And eventually, the thing is, eventually you have carbonaceous chondrites that you can mine in the asteroid belt and you can get hydrogen perhaps from the solar wind. If you have a high enough energy intensive technology, eventually, this space colony could be independent of the earth. But, at the beginning, they know that all the Earth has to do is pull the plug and they're all dead. After a few generations of living under this scimitar, you know, by the . . . I never say so, but in the story L-5 has become totally independent, but they have this legacy of being totally dependent upon the earth for life, and so naturally enough, they love the Earth and hate it; they fear it. And they make jokes about "groundhogs." In place of the dirty joke in our society, or more accurately the Polish joke, is the Earth joke. Jokes about "groundhogs"—it's a hidden kind of xenophobia and that's the way they express it.

S: The Earth also seems to feel the same way about L-5.

H: Yeah . . . yeah . . . because they're up there in the sky. The . . . the society I postulate is kind of a half-assed society, I guess. They're very paranoid about H-bombs and things. And these clowns up in the sky want to have H-bombs, they can drop them on us . . . And the thing is, the people living at L-5 are living in a rather comfortable environment, whereas the people on Earth are shoulder-to-shoulder.

S: What about the end . . .

H: Yeah, the end of the story. I . . . you know, originally, I didn't have that ending. Ben wanted me to spell it out. I didn't want to, I wanted to leave the options open, and the last line of the story was originally, "Maybe there were fireworks on Earth." That's all it said about it. But Ben wanted me to spell out what had happened. In the story, L-5 is the only place where there is human life in the solar system and the Earth has gone to hell in a handbasket, and the people on L-5 are primitive survivors of a high-technology culture. They don't understand anything about their satellite, they just know how to run the automatic machines. There are religions . . . It's kind of an old thing. Like "Universe" by Heinlein.

S: We were talking earlier about Spinrad's article. Did you read it?

H: Yeah, I read it. It's very convincing stuff. Norm is a compelling essayist. Always enjoy reading his stuff. But I think he makes his case a little too strongly, and there are a couple of technical errors. I'm trying to think . . . The most outrageous one is, he says that it takes only one sixth the amount of energy to put something in orbit from the moon as it does from the earth. Well, it's true the moon has one sixth the earth's gravity, but it is not just gravity that you're fighting. You have to fight the atmosphere, too, and it's not a linear relationship, either. It turns out that it takes 1/20 as much

energy to orbit something from the moon, and that's a big difference. And that is the root, the base rationale behind the O'Neill plan and I can't understand how Norm could drop the ball like that. Norm is an honest, honorable man, and I know he wouldn't misrepresent the case but...

S: He seems to be basically for the idea.

H: Yeah, he's for the idea. But he and I agree that it's got it all backwards. That we aren't going into space to put up satellites that generate energy for Earth, we're using the energy crisis as blackmail to make these groundhogs put us into space.

S: He said that one of the problems was that the transport linear accelerator would have to be "diabolically accurate."

H: Yeah, that is a problem. And, in fact, the basic text for the L-5 project is a long, detailed article that O'Neill did in PHYSICS TODAY in 1974... but that is one thing he didn't describe. Now, I don't think that, uh... I haven't checked, but it seems to me that if we can land something on the Moon within about a hundred meters of where we aimed it we can throw stuff off the Moon, too, with a similar kind of accuracy. I just don't know how you catch it. You don't have a big fielder's glove up in the sky. The mass that goes into the catcher has to be made on Earth, and... What do you have, a great big net that weighs ten thousand tons? You can't do that. I don't know how...

S: He describes a passive bag of some sort...

H: Yeah, and yet this passive bag has to be built on Earth, and it has to be big—it has to be a couple of miles wide, anyhow. I don't know, that is a problem. It may be that we can't simply kick things off the Moon, it may be that they have to be guided in some way. I've got to talk to somebody about that. I've got to find a way around that. I don't want to gloss over it in my book. I don't know... it's an elegant idea, just using the dirt on the Moon to make the space colonies. And that is the weak point.

S: Spinrad seems to say that we should do what O'Neill is proposing, but we should do it slower.

H: Well, this is NASA's position, too. Okay, you know, it's probably my position, just for practicality. I feel—as O'Neill does, I think—that I would like this to happen while I'm alive. I would like to see it work. And maybe that's not realistic. Maybe, we should be content with just setting up the machinery and letting our descendants do it. NASA's game plan has essentially an L-5 type of colony after 2020. They have a thing that they call a Relevance Tree, that is, showing what technologies we need to get to, say, a Martian colony, solar satellite power-generating stations, or L-5. And working backward, what sort of hardware we have to have and just how soon we can have that piece of hardware. It's a very compelling argument, it's originated by Jescro von Puttkamer

THE O'NEILL PLAN: SPACE STATIONS THAT PAY FOR THEMSELVES

GERRARD K. O'NEILL, professor of physics at Princeton University, proposed a plan, now referred to as the O'Neill plan, in an article entitled "The Colonization of Space," which appeared in the September, 1974 issue of PHYSICS TODAY.

The plan calls for a reusable space shuttle, like the one being developed by NASA now, to ferry basic equipment, supplies, and 2000 people to a point along the lunar orbit called Lagrange 5, or L-5. This is a stable point in the Earth-Moon system where the effects of gravity and centrifugal force cancel, so that anything put at this spot (or at any of the Lagrange points) tends to remain at that spot.

While the 2000 laborers and technicians assemble a prefabricated space station where they will live, 200 other workers mine the lunar surface and launch the material toward L-2, where it is collected. This is the key to O'Neill's plan. Getting the material from the Moon is cheaper than launching it from the surface of the Earth, because of the lower lunar gravity and the lunar vacuum. In fact, O'Neill's plan calls for obtaining 98% of the total 500 ton mass of the Model 1 colony from the Moon.

The material collected is then towed to L-5 where it is processed and used to complete Model 1, which, when finished will have a total population of around 10,000. Lunar soil and crushed rock will be used to form plains, valleys, hills, etc. Oxygen generated by the smelting of ores and hydrogen imported from the Earth will be used to make water to fill rivers and lakes.

Finally, Model 1 will be able to carry out energy-intensive manufacturing processes, like the production of aluminum by the Hall process. Perfectly formed crystals to be used in Earth-based industry could be grown in the weightless conditions of outer space. Another economic payoff envisioned by O'Neill is the saving on transport costs when tools and fabricated structures for Model 2 are made from lunar material (or perhaps from material from the asteroids) at Colony 1 rather than on the Earth. Construction costs for future models should gradually lessen as space-based industry grows.

The idea of building a satellite solar power station (SSPS) at Model 1, not mentioned in O'Neill's first article, has been added to the plan. Peter Glaser, Vice-President of Engineering Sciences at the consulting firm of Arthur D. Little, Inc., first came up with the idea of an SSPS (not in conjunction with O'Neill's plan). The satellite would travel in a geo-synchronous orbit above the Earth, catching the Sun's rays and beaming the energy down in the form of microwaves.

If the space colony began manufacturing these satellites, O'Neill believes that selling the cheap energy to Earth would soon pay for the entire colonization venture.

Of course, Model 1 will only be the first colony. After it is completed, the colonists will turn out Model 2, which will be less dependent on Earth for resources and therefore can be larger and relatively

cheaper. More SSPS's will be manufactured to pay for this and future colonies. Since the space stations actually orbit the spot known as L-5, there is room for several thousand colonies. And perhaps some colonists would want to turn their space station into a space ship and explore the solar system, or beyond.

In O'Neill's original article he estimates put costs of the Model 1 project below that spent by the United States on the Apollo project. NASA has shown interest in his plan and thirty engineers and scientists have worked out a proposal which will be described in the NASA publication "Space Colonization: A Design Study" to be released as we go to press (August, 1976). For information on this report, contact Professor Charles H. Holbrow, Colgate University, Hamilton, NY, 13346.

Grass roots support for O'Neill's plan is rapidly growing. An organization called the L-5 Society was formed last year in Tucson, Arizona to collect, collate and disseminate information on the plan. The group publishes a monthly newsletter which states their long-range goal: to disband in a mass meeting at L-5. Regular membership in the society costs \$20.00; student membership is \$10.00. The address is: L-5 Society, 1620 N. Park Ave., Tucson, AZ. 85719.

Informal recruitment for the 10,000 people to man Model 1 has already begun. If interested, contact Charles "Ed" Tandy, PROMETHUS SOCIETY, 102 Morris Drive, Laurel, MD. 20810.

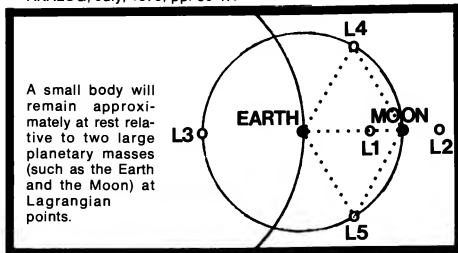
—Elbert Lindsey, Jr.

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and he doesn't think we can have this sort of project before the first quarter of the 21st century. He's probably right, but I feel that if there were nothing else important to do, if we absolutely had to have an L-5 colony up in the sky we could have it by 1990. It would be a project on the order of World War II, but we could do it. O'Neill's basic point is that the technology exists. There's nothing profoundly new to be done and if it were important enough, we could do it right now.

S: Has your novel, *MINDBRIDGE*, been released yet?

H: As a matter of fact, it went to press last week, so they're probably all printed and sitting in the warehouse right now. Its publication date, I think, is the thirty-first of July. I don't know. I hope to have a copy waiting in my mail box...oh, it's a beautiful book, they...not the writing, the production of it, they...normally, they commission an artist to do a cover, but this one, they found a painting in a gallery in New York and just bought it off the wall, and it fit the book perfectly, and it's beautiful. It's a strange, surrealist, Dali type cover. And the book, the book is full of gonzo stuff: it's got graphs, charts, mathematical equations, sheet music, telegrams—it's just full of things that aren't normally in books. So, it cost them an arm and a leg to print it. They had to send it to an academic press—their normal typographer couldn't handle it. And I've seen the galleys and it really looks pretty. One thing that's going to sell the book, especially in paperback—you know, you pick up a book, and riffle through it, and to be hit with all this stuff, you'll just have to take it home and find out what's inside.

S: Could you tell us a little about what it's about, to whet our appetites?

H: Yeah. I set out to do a few things, you know...normally, it's a mistake to see a book—for me—to see a book as a literary construct; it should be a story first. It shouldn't be out to prove a point. The basic thrust of American literature now seems to be in the direction of meta-fiction, that is, when you write a story, what you're writing about is storytelling, about writing, rather than about life, which is fine if people like to read it; most people don't like to read it. Well, this book is meta-fiction, it's meta-science fiction. I wanted to write the ultimate hard science fiction novel—but about total bullshit. It's about telepathy and matter transmission, which are both pie-in-the-sky stuff. And they're described down to eight decimal places in this book. They're simply accepted, they're part of life. I have excerpts from textbooks and things like that, you know, this is the equation that defines the Levant-Meyer translation, and...I've got this one chapter, that I called "Numbers and Dollars." I was going to call it "Readers are Advised" because in the third paragraph, it says, "Readers without adequate preparation in college mathematics should skip to the graph at the end." And it's got this huge equation...Oh, it was fun!

S: Think what trouble you're going to cause. Everybody is going to try to figure it out and you'll get all these nasty letters...

H: I know. I got so many letters about *THE FOREVER WAR*. I made one mistake in *THE FOREVER WAR*. Notebooks full of mathematics and I didn't look up the prefix "beva." The prefix beva is, of course, billion electron volts, and it only applies to a linear accelerator type situation. Now, my mind was warped and I thought that it was, like, bigger than mega, so I said, "a beva-watt laser," which means nothing! There's no such thing as a beva-watt. And this guy, some physics student...no, he's not a student, he's a physicist, wrote me a long letter, four pages full of equations. He pointed out the beva-watt thing, and he said, "Well, I think that your laser isn't

going to work, and this is why," and he gave me these equations. Well, I've got equations too, for Christ's sake, and I used them. And I wrote him back a four page letter with my equations. It depends on what journal you look at, for Christ's sake. But it was good fun.

But I've had lots of correspondence about *THE FOREVER WAR*. I do try to answer my mail, but at one time I got like fifty letters and I was trying to write a book, and I didn't have time...I just answered a letter that's been sitting on my desk for eighteen months. You know, I finally got around to it...

Oh, but I was saying, you know, I started out to write this book, and I knew I was going to sell it so I could have written anything. Because it was right after *THE FOREVER WAR* had sold so well, and I had an option with St. Martin's, and I knew that they'd pick up the book. So I said, "Well, I'm going to do a number," and what I had was sort of a Heinlein-esque straight writing job on the surface, but I was answering a specific critical problem. One of my favorite books, or series of books, is John dos Passos' U.S.A. TRILOGY, and he makes a big mistake in the U.S.A. TRILOGY, in the organization of it, and I wrote this book as sort of an answer to that structural problem—which is normally a mistake, but I think it worked in this wise, because I was also answering a critical problem specifically about it. A guy named Steven Becker, who is one hell of a good writer, he's had a couple of best sellers—he's even written some science fiction, so I respect his opinion—he told me that it's impossible to write a science fiction novel that's a good science fiction novel and also a good novel. He says, because a science fiction writer has to expend so much of his creative energy setting up the world that his story takes place in that there's not enough left for the normal concerns of a novelist. That is, as a straight novelist, I can say "Philadelphia," and that's all I have to say. I can't say "61 Cygni A" without explaining what it is and, you know, what life is like there. It's a good point, and you can see, maybe 90% of the other worlds type science fiction has this problem, but you can also make counter-examples. There are very good science fiction books that are also good novels. See, the U.S.A. TRILOGY is a kind of berserk book that's broken down into billions of chapters—if you've read *THE SHEEP LOOK UP* or any of those Brunner books, he does the same thing. So I wrote this book this way. It's got 75,000 words and 53 chapters. Some of them are less than a page long. And I was answering Steven Becker's criticism in this way. I said, okay, I'll write a novel with footnotes, essentially. All of the science fiction stuff is in its own little chapters, and there are things like extracts from textbooks and news reports, commercials—I got a Westinghouse commercial that's scored for three-dimensional holographic television. It's all numbers...And, so, essentially, the book itself is in chapters that are called Chapter One, Chapter Two, Chapter Three...and everything else is called, you know, Gonzo Something.

If you lived in that society, you could read those parts that are called chapters, and it would be a perfectly sensible, regular novel. But since we don't live in this society, we need the footnotes. And so, they're scattered all through the book. Whenever the reader needs to know something, I've stopped, and I've put in a ten page long footnote and then go on with the novel.

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It was a chancy thing to do. You can see how something like that would be boring as hell, so I had to be careful with the way that I put the things in, so it was still an interesting book. And I fudged a little, because I was playing with this idea. One basic concern of the novelist is delineating the character of his main character, showing how it changes through the book or through his life, and I put those as footnotes, too. Autobiographical statements, you know — like, I've got something he had to write on the board a thousand times when he was six years old — all the way up to the moment he dies. They're called Autobiography and a date, and they're, some of them are interviews. . . . He writes a book called PEACEMAKER, or rather, his diaries have been collected in a book called PEACEMAKER: THE DIARIES OF JACQUE LEFAVRE, which was the working title of the book. It was called PEACEMAKER on the contract. I thought PEACEMAKER looked too pat after THE FOREVER WAR, and another book I've got, STUDY WAR NO MORE. . . . But it worked. I was very proud of that book when I finally finished it. God! It was so complicated. I've got notebooks and notebooks of stuff. And it makes sense to me. Maybe nobody will be able to understand it, but it was fun. But the critics are going to stomp me dead. They're going to say, "He showed such promise with his first book." Everybody thought THE FOREVER WAR was my first book. It was my sixth!

S: What were your first five?

H: Well, I wrote . . . my first book was WAR YEAR and then I collected COSMIC LAUGHTER, an anthology, then I did three adventure novels under the name Robert Graham, and then THE FOREVER WAR came out. Actually, I started THE FOREVER WAR, I worked on it for four years, so in a sense it was my second book — that is, I had one book published when I started THE FOREVER WAR, but I wrote all these others while I was writing THE FOREVER WAR.

S: Why did you use a pseudonym?

H: Oh, I had to, it's a house rule. That is, there is a series of adventure novels that I would not agree to write all of, so there's a name, Robert Graham, that they use for anybody who writes one of the books. It's common practice. Like, John Norman is God-knows-how-many people.

"They're going to give a rusty razor with each copy so you can open your veins when you finish it."

S: War seems to figure in several of your stories.

H: Well, you write what you know. I started my writing career when I came back from Viet Nam, so a lot of my early stuff has to do with war. I don't write about war anymore. In fact, I . . . well, I may do it. I've got one novel that I'm not going to start for another ten years that I want to be the THE NAKED AND THE DEAD of Viet Nam. You know, I want to write a definitive Viet Nam novel.

And, I've got . . . A French writer is doing what he calls a montage novel and he wants various people to write parts of it, and he'll put them all together in a strange framework. He wants me to write one about war in the future where they have matter transmitters. And I might do that, just as a short story. And just for the kick of being part of this strange project. And, thinking about what it would do to combat to have matter transmitters is interesting . . . suddenly appear behind enemy lines, flicker in and out . . .

S: There wouldn't be any lines . . .

H: No lines — right. I can see it as a metaphor for guerrilla action, just carried to an extreme.

S: I think you did a lot of interesting things in THE FOREVER WAR as far as the kinds of things that happen in a war like that.

H: Well, I'd tried to think it out. That's what all those notebooks are for. One thing I didn't realize about THE FOREVER WAR — I started out to write a metaphor about Viet Nam and America's involvement in Viet Nam. Well, I dropped it about halfway through the book, because the book had developed a logic of its own. Then, last year I met this reader from India who explained to me how I'd followed the metaphor exactly all the way to the last page. It explained America's involvement in Viet Nam to him. And looking at it the way he explained it, yeah, that's right, but I didn't do it consciously. I only know one war, and so that was my basic material for the book, and I subconsciously followed the structure of Viet Nam even after I'd consciously rejected it.

It's funny, I was telling a guy this morning, I don't know where the ideas come from. To me it's a mystical process, they just settle on you and . . . I read a lot and I talk a lot and listen a lot. I can tell after the fact where the material came from, but . . . You know, if you sit down and try to write something about something, it's very, very difficult. I am having a hell of a time writing this nonfiction book, because I know exactly what it's going to be. And knowing it, why do I have to write it anymore? To me, you know, it's . . . I entertain myself at the typewriter. Even though it's normally hard work, even nine days out of ten it's hard work, but that tenth day is great. This ether in the air is telling me a story, and I go to the typewriter to find out what happened today.

S: When you get an assignment for a story, say, from Ben Bova as you mentioned before, do you handle it differently? H: Yeah, yeah. Very much differently. I put on my professional hat when I do that, and say, well, all right, here's a job. Like, UNICEF sent me a letter, says, "We need a story under 2000 words about children and food in the future." I looked at the letter, said, "Under 2000 words?" But I said, "All right, by God, I'll do it," and I sat down and wrote it in an afternoon. I've never been paid so much per hour. \$200 for an afternoon's work.

But, yeah . . . It's like waving a red flag in front of an animal. It's a challenge, so I'll do it. I wouldn't sit down and tell myself, "Well, why don't we try to write a story under 2000 words about children and food in the future?" "All right! Go back to bed, you schmuck!"

S: You said earlier that you're currently working on five books . . .

H: Yeah, well, that's an exaggeration. I'm only working on two at a time. But, yeah, I've got five contracts outstanding. Well, one of them is an anthology I've had kicking around for years so that's no work. I'm just going to revise the introduction. One's a novel that I've got eighty percent written already. Kind of a gas of a novel . . . funny adventures and lots of good space stuff in it. And one is this space colonization book, which is a hell of a big project. Two of them are Star Trek adventures that I'm doing the way I did the other adventure novels, trying to make them good but realizing they have to be done within certain strictures. You can't write a novel.

S: Are these STAR TREK books all original material?

H: Yeah. Jim Blish was going to do them, and he died. I'm doing two and Ted Cogswell is doing one. I don't know who else is doing them. Fred Pohl, who's editing the series, told me I could have a half a dozen of them if I wanted them, but I didn't have the time to do them.

S: You said you've done one anthology, COSMIC LAUGHTER, and you have another one.

H: Yeah, this new one. I spent a lot of work on that and I was proud of it and very disappointed that they didn't pick it up. It's called STUDY WAR NO MORE. It's a collection of science fiction alternatives to war. And where I don't think any of them work, I don't think that any of them are going to save the world, yet, it's a useful intellectual tool. You know, we treat war as if it is inevitable, as if it is a part of human nature, and I see it as a perversion of human nature, something that's been going on so long that nobody questions it, they just go ahead and do it. I would rather the leaders get together and flipped a



BIRTHPLACE OF CREATION

Edmond Hamilton

"Birthplace of Creation" is the last of the Captain Future tales. Curt Newton (known as Captain Future) first appeared in his own pulp magazine during the start of World War II, Winter, 1940. The series was scripted by two authors, Edmond Hamilton and Brett Sterling (William Morrison), with Hamilton getting the better record of the two. Seventeen issues of the CAPTAIN FUTURE pulp were published from issue one in the Winter of 1940 to the Spring of 1944.

Captain Future was the dream of the future. He was a master wizard of science, and the consummate do-gooder. He was the past's future crimefighter; born into crimefighting when his father, Roger Newton, and his mother, both brilliant scientists were killed in their laboratory on the Moon, Cap was the greatest adventurer of the future. Nor was he alone in his dedication. There was the Brain, created from Simon Wright's brain because his body grew too old to house it anymore; Otho, the android; and Grog, the robot. This strange trio plus Cap Future made the Futuremen.

The first seventeen novels were basically mystery novels with monsters, ray guns, and planets added. It wasn't until the novellas in STARTLING STORIES, that a sophistication cropped up. Many astute aficionados feel that these ten novellas were the best in the entire series, perhaps good enough to stand up against the best science fiction written then or today. And among those ten final stories, it is felt that "Birthplace of Creation" was the best.

Unfortunately, as is the case with much of the fiction that appeared in the pulps of the 1930's and 1940's, the Cap novellas were forgotten, although all of the novel length fiction was reprinted in paperback form. STARWIND is proud to print, for the first time since its publication in the May, 1951 issue of STARTLING STORIES, "Birthplace of Creation."

—Gary Hoppenstand—

Citadel of the Futuremen

Garrand watched the face of the Moon grow larger in the forward port of his small cruiser. A white and terrible face, he thought. A death's-head with meteor-gnawed bones and gaping crater-wounds, bleak and cruel and very silent, watching him come and thinking secret boding thoughts about him. A feeling of sickness grew in him.

"I am a fool and soon I will probably be a dead fool," he said to himself.

He was not a brave man. He was very fond of living and he did not think of death at all as a thing to be dared and laughed at. The knowledge that he was likely to die there on the Moon gave him qualms of physical anguish and made him look as white and hollow as the stony face that watched him through the port. And yet he did not turn back. There was something in Garrand that was stronger than his fear. His hands trembled, but they held the cruiser grimly on its course.

The stark plains and mountain ranges took size and shape, the lonely mountains of the Moon that looked on nothing and the plains where nothing stirred, not even the smallest wind or whirl of dust. Men had gone out to other worlds and other stars. They had ranged far across space, founding colonies on asteroids and cities on the shores of alien seas. But they left the deathly airless Moon alone. They had looked at it once and gone away. There were only four who made the Moon their home — and not all of those four were men.

Tycho Crater widened out below the little ship. Licking dry lips metallic with the taste of fear, Garrand consulted a map, drawn carefully to scale and showing in that desolation one intricate diagram of a manmade structure. There were ominous gaps in that diagram and Garrand was painfully aware of them. He made his calculations and set his ship down well beyond the outer periphery of defenses marked on the chart.

His landing was a clumsy nervous one. White pumicedust burst upward around the hull and settled slowly back again. Garrand cut his jets and sat for a moment looking out across Tycho, all ringed around in the distance with cliffs and spires and pinnacles of blasted rock that glittered in the light. There was no sign of the structure indicated on the chart. It was all below ground. Even its observatory dome was set flush, reflecting the Sun's unsoftened glare no more than the surrounding plain.

Presently Garrand rose, moving with the stiff reluctance of a man going to the gallows. He checked over the bulky shapes of a considerable mass of equipment. His examination was minute and he made one or two readjustments. Then he struggled into a pressure suit and opened the airlock. The air went out with a whistling rush, and after that there was no sound, only the utter silence of a world that has heard nothing since it was made.

Working in that vacuum Garrand carried out a light hand-sledge and set it in the dust. Then he brought out the bulky pieces of equipment and loaded them onto it. He was able to do this alone because of the weak gravitation and when he was through he was able for the same reason to tow the sledge behind him.

He set off across the crater. The glare was intense. Sweat gathered on him and ran in slow trickles down his face. He suffered in the heavy armor, setting one weighted boot before the other, with the little puffs of dust rising and falling back at every step, hauling the sledge behind him. And fear grew steadily in him as he went on.

He knew—all the System knew—that the four who lived here were not here now, that they were far away on a distant troubled world. But their formidable name and presence seemed to haunt this lifeless sphere and he was walking now



into the teeth of the deadly defenses they had left behind them.

"They can be beaten," he told himself, sweating. "I've got to beat them."

He studied his map again. He knew exactly how far he had come from the ship. Leaving himself a wide margin of safety he activated the detector-mechanism on the sledge. The helmet of his pressure-suit was fitted with ultra-sensitive hearing devices that had nothing to do with sonic waves but translated sub-electronic impulses from the detector into audible sound-signals.

He stood still, listening intently. But the detector said nothing and he went on, very slowly now and cautiously, across the dead waste until his footsteps in the dust approached the line of that outer circle on the map. Then the detector spoke with a faint small clicking.

Garrand stopped. He bent over the panel of the mechanism, a jumble of dials, sorters, frequency-indicators and pattern-indicators. Above them a red pip burned in a ground-glass field. His heart hammered hard and he reached hastily for a black oblong bulk beside the detector.

He thought, "I'm still far enough away so that the blast won't be lethal if this doesn't work."

The thought was comforting but unconvincing. He forced his hand to steady, to pick up the four-pronged plugs and insert them, one by one in the proper order, into the side of the detector. Then he dropped behind the sledge and waited.

The black oblong hummed. He could feel it humming where his shoulder touched the metal of the sledge. It was designed to pick up its readings from the detector, to formulate them, adjust itself automatically to the indicated pattern and frequency, to broadcast an electronic barrier that would blank out the impulse-receptivity of the hidden trap's sensor-unit. That was its purpose. It should work. But if it did not...

He waited, the muscles of his belly knotted tight. There was no flash or tremor of a blast. After he had counted slowly to a hundred he got up again and looked. The red pip had faded from the ground-glass screen. There was a white one in place of it.

Garrand watched that white pip as though it were the face of his patron saint, hauling the sledge on slowly through that outer circle and through the ones beyond it that were only guessed at. Three times more the urgent clicking sounded in his ears and the dials and pointers changed—and three times the pip faded from red to white and Garrand was still alive when he reached the metal valve door set into the floor of the crater.

The controls of that door were plainly in sight but he did not touch them. Instead he hauled a portable scanner off the sledge and used it to examine the intimate molecular structure of the metal and all its control connections. By this means he found the particular bolt-head that was a switch and turned it, immobilizing a certain device set to catch an unknowing intruder as soon as he opened the valve.

Within minutes after that Garrand had the door open and was standing at the head of a steep flight of steps, going down. His heart still thudding away and he felt weak in the knees—but he was filled with exultation and a great pride. Few other men, he thought, perhaps none, could have penetrated safely to the very threshold of this most impregnable of all places in the Solar System.

He did not relax his caution. A large mass of equipment went with him down the dark stairway, including the scanner. The valve closed automatically behind him and below in a small chamber he waited until pressure had built up and

There were only four who made the moon their home — and not all of those four were men.

another door automatically opened. He found nothing more of menace except a system of alarm bells, which he put out of commission—not because there was anyone to hear them, but because he knew there would be recorders and he wanted no signs, audible or visible, of his visit.

The recorders themselves were relatively easy to detect. With an instrument brought for the purpose he blanked off their relay systems and went on across the great circular central chamber with the glassite dome through which the sunlight poured. He peered with a scientist's fascinated wonder at the laboratory apparatus of various sorts in that and the smaller chambers which opened off it until he came to what of all things he was looking for—the heavy locked door of a vault, sunk deep in the lunar rock.

Garrand worked for a long time over that door. The silence was beginning to get to him and the uneasy knowledge that he was where he had no right to be. He began to listen for the voices and the steps of those who might come in and find him.

They were far away and Garrand knew that he was safe.

But he was not a criminal by habit and now that the challenge to his skill was past he began to feel increasingly guilty and unclean. Personal belongings accused him, an open book, a pair of boots, beds and chests and clothing. If it had been merely a laboratory he would not have minded so much—but it was also a dwelling place and he felt like a common thief.

That feeling was forgotten when he entered the vault. There were many things in that vast lunar cavern, but Garrand had no more than a passing glance for any of them except the massive file-racks where the recorded data which related to voyages were spooled and kept.

Under the clear light that had come on of itself with the opening of the door Garrand searched the racks, puzzling out the intricate filing system. He had taken off his helmet. His hands shook visibly and his breathing was loud and irregular but these were only secondary manifestations.

His mind, faced with a difficult problem to solve, slipped by long habit into calculating-machine efficiency and it was not long before he found what he wanted.

He took the spool in his two hands, as tenderly as though it were made of the delicate stuff of dreams and apt to shatter at a breath. He carried it to the large table that stood by the racks and fed the end of the tape into a reader. His face had grown pale and quite rigid except that his mouth twitched a little at the corners. He set up his last piece of equipment beside the reader, a photonic recorder used to make copies of a master spool, synchronized them and then closed the switches.

The two spools unwound, one giving, the other receiving, and Garrand remained motionless over the viewer, seeing visions beyond price and listening to the voices that spoke of cosmic secrets. When the spool was finished it was a long time before he moved. His eyes were still busy with their visions and they were strangely dull and shining all at once, shining and far away.

At last he shook himself and laughed, a small gasping sound that might well have been a sob. He replaced the original in the rack and put the second spool into a special pouch on his belt. In the vault he left everything exactly as he had found it and when he came out again onto the Moon's surface he reset the hidden trigger that guarded the outer door.

As he had penetrated the defenses on the plain, so he went back through them again, in a double agony lest now, when he had the thing he had taken such incredible chances for, he

should blunder and be killed. The shadows of the crater edge were crawling toward him, sharp and black. The last premonitory clicking of the detector, the last fading of the warning pip from red to white and he was safe, running toward the ship into the knife-edged darkness of the shadow.

Long before night came Garrand was gone, plunging across the narrow gulf to Earth. He did not know how to give vent to the wildness of his exultation, so he held it in but it burned in his face and eyes.

"Tomorrow," he said aloud to himself, over and over. "Tomorrow we'll be on our way." He laughed, addressing someone who was not present. "You said I couldn't do it, Herrick. You said I couldn't!"

Behind him the darkening face of the Moon looked after him.

Cosmic Secret

Four came home to the Moon after many days. Four, of whom only one was an ordinary man.

Curt Newton, the man—Otho, the android or artificial man who was human in everything but origin—Grag, the towering metal man or intelligent robot—and Simon Wright, he who had once been a man but whose brain only now lived on in a strange mechanical body.

Their ship came down like a thunderbolt of metal from the sky. The camouflaged doors of an underground hangar opened silently to receive it and closed as silently.

Into the great circular room beneath the observatory dome the four Futuremen came. Curt Newton paused by the wall to activate the recorder panel. It showed blank. It always showed blank.

He sat down slowly, a tall man with red hair and a bronzed face that looked now very tired.

"Do you think our work out there will stick, Simon?"

He addressed the small square metal case hovering on motor-beams before him, its strange "face" of lens-eyes turned toward him. The serum-case, in which Simon Wright's brain lived its life.

"I am confident," said Simon with his precise articulation of metallic artificial accents, "that there will be no more trouble between Uranus Mines and the natives."

Curt frowned and sighed. "I hope so. When will they learn how to deal with planetary primitives?"

Grag spoke up loudly. He was standing, a seven-foot giant of metal, with his head turned and his photo-electric eyes staring intently across the big room.

"Curt, someone's been here," his great voice boomed.

"No, I checked the recorders," Newton said without turning.

"I don't care," Grag persisted. "That chair by the vault door has been moved. I was the last one out when we left and I remember exactly where it stood. It's been moved a good three inches."

Otho burst into laughter. "Listen to Old Hawkeye. Three inches!" The android, so perfectly human in appearance that only something bright and strange lurking in his green eyes betrayed an inner difference, went on mockingly, "Are you sure it's not two and a half inches?"

Grag began to protest angrily in his foghorn voice. Curt swung around irritably to silence them. But Simon Wright said gravely, "Wait, Curtis. You know that the constitution of Grag's metal brain makes his memory absolutely photographic. If he says the chair has been moved, it has been moved."

"But the recorders?"

"They *could* have been blanked, you know. It's theoretically—" Curt began and then he stopped and swore. "Blast you, Grag! Why did you have to raise doubt in my mind? Now I'll have to take down the recorders to check them and that's the devil and all of a job."

Irritation riding him, he went out of the big room and came back with tools. He scowled at Grag. "You'd better be right!"

Simon and Otho helped him in the delicate work of disassembling the recorders. They examined both the microfilm and the interior relay circuits bit by bit.

Curt's irritation left him suddenly. He looked sharply at the others. He had found it—the minute blurred line where the film had started to roll and been arrested. The relay circuits were a fraction of a decimal out of synchronization now.

Otho whistled softly. "Blanked!" he said. "And so beautifully done—nothing fused or blown out, the derangement so small that you'd never notice it unless you were searching for it."

"So I was right," Grag boomed triumphantly. "I knew I was right. When I see a thing that's changed I—"

"Shut up," Curt Newton told him. He looked, puzzled, at Simon. "No criminal did this—no ordinary criminal. The job of blanking these relays required tremendous scientific ability."

Simon brooded, hovering. "That's obvious. Only an expert in sub-electronics would be capable. But that seems incongruous. Why would a top scientist come prowling in here like a common thief?"

Curt turned. "Grag, will you see if anything else has been moved or taken?"

The metal giant started stalking through the rooms. Curt remained silent and thoughtful, the frown on his tanned face deepening.

Grag came back. "No. Nothing else has been tampered with."

"Yet it was," Curt said slowly. He looked again at Simon. "I've been thinking. An expert in sub-electronics . . . Do you remember the nuclear physics man down at New York Tech whom we met at Government Center a few months ago?"

"Garris? Garrand—some name like that? I remember. A nice little man."

"Yes, I thought so too—very eager about his work. But I remember now he asked me a question—"

Curt broke off suddenly. He went rapidly across the big room, unlocked the vault door and inside the silent lunar cavern he went straight to the files.

Simon had followed him. And when Simon saw the spool that Curt drew from the file his lens-eyes turned to Curt's face with a startled swiftness.

"Curtis, *no*! You don't think—"

"It was what he asked me about," Curt said. "The Birth-place."





The word went echoing solemnly back and forth around the cold rock walls. And Curt stared at Simon, not really seeing him, seeing uncannily awesome things that lived in memory, and a strange look came into his face—a strange look indeed for the man Curt Newton. A look of fear.

Simon said, "How could he know of the Birthplace?"

That word had never been spoken to anyone. They hardly spoke it even among themselves. Such a secret was not for the knowledge nor the use of men and they had guarded it more carefully than the sum total of all other knowledge they possessed. Now the very sound of that name brought Garg and Otho to the door and wrought a sudden tension that filled the cavern with a waiting stillness.

Curt said heavily, "He connected the theoretical possibility with the work we did on Mercury. He's a brilliant man, Simon—too brilliant."

"Perhaps," said Garg, "he only looked for the secret and couldn't find it. After all, our filing system . . ."

Curt shook his head. "If he could get in here he could find what he wanted." He examined the spool. "He could make a copy of this and there would be no way of telling that it had been done."

He stood motionless for a moment longer and no one spoke. Otho studied his face and shot one quick bright glance at Simon. Simon moved uneasily on his gliding force-beams.

Curt replaced the spool and turned. "We've got to find out about this man. We'll go to New York, at once."

Very soon thereafter the *Comet* rose from the dark gap of the hangar-mouth and shot away toward the great green globe of Earth.

Not much later, at headquarters of the Planet Police in New York, old Marshal Ezra Gurney stared at Curt Newton in blank amazement.

"Garrand?" he said. "But he's a reputable man, a scientist!"

"Nevertheless," said Curt grimly, "I want all the information you can get and fast."

Simon spoke. "This is urgent, Ezra. We cannot afford delay."

The grizzled old spaceman glanced from one to the other, and then to Otho. "Something really bad, eh? All right, I'll do what I can."

He went out of the office. Otho leaned against the wall and remained motionless, watching Curt. Simon hovered near the desk. Neither one of them was afflicted with nerves. Curt moved restlessly about, brooding, his hands touching things and putting them down again in wire-taut gestures. The intricate multichron on the wall whirled softly and the minutes slid away, on Earth, on Mars, on the far-flung worlds of the System. No one spoke and Ezra did not come back.

Simon said at last, "It would take time, even for Ezra."

"Time!" said Curt. "If Garrand has the secret we have no time."

He paced the small neat room, a man oppressed with heavy thoughts. The sound of the door opening brought him whirling around to face Ezra almost as though he were facing his executioner.

"Well?"

"Garrand took off from Earth on the twenty-first," said Ezra. "He flew a ship of his own, apparently an experimental model on which he has been working for some time in company with a man named Herrick, who is also listed as chief pilot. Destination, none. Purpose, cosmic ray research beyond the System. Because of Garrand's reputation and standing there was no difficulty about the clearance. That was all I could get."

"That's enough," said Curt. "More than enough." His face was bleak and the color had gone out of it under the tan. He looked very tired and in a way so strange that Ezra came up to him and demanded, "What is it, Curt? What did Garrand take from the laboratory?"

Curt answered, "He took the secret of the Birthplace of Matter."

Ezra stared, uncomprehending. "Is that a secret you can tell me?"

Curt said hopelessly, "I can tell you now. For it's known now to Garrand and this other man."

"What is it, then?"

"Ezra, it is the secret of creation."

There was a long silence. It was obvious from Gurney's face that the term was too large for him to understand. Yet Curt Newton did not continue as yet. He looked beyond them and his face was drawn and haggard.

"We'll have to go back there," he said, his voice low. "We'll have to. And I hoped never to go back."

Simon's expressionless eyes were fixed on him. Otho said loudly, "What's there to be afraid of? We ran the whirls before. And as for Garrand and the other one—"

"I am not afraid of them," Curt Newton said.

"I know," said Simon. "He was the only one who was with you in the shrine of the Watchers there. I know what you are afraid of—yourself."

"I still don't get it," Ezra said. "The secret of creation? Creation of what?"

"Of the universe, Ezra. Of all the matter in the universe."

A strange wonder came on Gurney's timeworn face. He said nothing. He waited.

"You remember," Curt told him, "when we came back from our first deep-space voyage? You remember that right after that we designed the electron-assembly plants that they've used ever since to replenish Mercury's thinning atmosphere? Where do you think we got the knowledge to do that, to juggle electrons into desired types of matter on a big scale?"

Gurney's voice was a whisper now. "You got that knowledge out in deep space?"

"In deep, deep space, Ezra. Near the center of our galaxy, amid the thick star-clusters and nebulae beyond Sagittarius. There lies the beating heart of our universe."

He made a gesture. "Back in the Twentieth Century the scientist Millikan first guessed the truth. The matter of the universe constantly melts away into radiation. Millikan believed that somewhere in the universe was a place where radiation was somehow built back into matter and that the so-called cosmic rays were the 'birth-cry' of the newborn matter. The fount of our material universe, the birthplace of material creation."

Awe was in Ezra's faded old eyes. "And you found that? And never told—never let anyone guess—"

"Garrand guessed," Curt said bitterly. "He connected our work at Mercury with our mysterious voyage. He tried to learn what I knew and when I would tell him nothing he came to the Moon and risked death to steal our records. And now he's gone to find it for himself."

Simon Wright said somberly, "He will only reap disaster if he tries to take it. I saw what almost happened there to you, Curtis."

"It's my fault," Curt said harshly. "We should have left no record. But I could not quite destroy it." He paused, then went on rapidly. "We've got to overtake him. What the other man, Herrick, may have in mind we can't tell. But Garrand is a fanatical researcher, who will tamper with the instruments of the Watchers as I did. He won't stop where I stopped!"

Ezra jumped to his feet. "I can have cruisers after him in an hour."

"They couldn't catch him now, Ezra. The *Comet* might. We'll have to make certain preparations and they'll take time. But even so we may catch him."

He turned, moving swiftly toward the door as though physical action were a relief from overpowering tension. Ezra

stopped him. "Curt, wait! Let me go with you. I should, you know, if it's a case of catching a lawbreaker."

Newton looked at him. "No, Ezra. You're only trapped by the lure of this thing as I was. As I was . . . No."

Simon's metallic voice intervened. "Let him go with us, Curtis. I think we might need him—that you might need him."

Back to the Moon, with five instead of four, went the *Comet* on wings of flame. In the hours that followed, the closed hangar-doors in silent Tycho gave no hint of the desperate rushed activity beneath.

But less than twenty-four hours after its return from Uranus the ship left the Moon a second time. It went out through the planetary orbits like a flying prisoner breaking out through bars, poised for a moment beyond Pluto to shift into a new kind of motion, then was gone into the outer darkness.

The Birthplace

The *Comet* was a fleck, a mote, a tiny gleam of manmade light falling into infinity. Behind it, lost somewhere along the farthest shores of a lightless sea, lay Earth and Sol and the outposts of familiar stars. Ahead was the great wilderness of Sagittarius, the teeming star-jungle that to the eye seemed crowded thick with burning Suns and nebulae.

The five within the ship were silent. Four were busy with the memories they had of the time they had come this way before, with the knowledge of what was still to be encountered. One, Ezra Gurney, could find no words to speak. He was a veteran spaceman. He had been a veteran when Curt Newton was born. He knew the Solar System from Pluto to Mercury and back again and he knew how the naked undimmed stars could shine.

But this was different—this voyaging of deepest space, this pursuing of the fleets and navies of the stars to their own harbor, this going in among them. In a way Ezra Gurney was afraid. No man, not even Curt Newton, could look at that flaming sky ahead and not be a little afraid.

The *Comet* had come into the region of the great clusters. Mighty hives of gathered Suns blazed and swarmed, rolling across space and time, carrying after them sweeping trains of scattered stars. Between and beyond the clusters and their trailing star-streams shone the glowing clouds of nebulae, banners of light flung out for a million miles across the firmament, ablaze with the glow of drowned and captured Suns. And beyond them all—the nebulae, the clusters and the stars—there showed the black brooding lightless immensity of a cloud of cosmic dust.

The soul of Ezra Gurney shook within him. Men had no business here in this battleground of angry gods. Men? But was he here with men?

"One-point-four degrees zenith," came the metallic voice of Simon Wright from where he hovered above a bulky instrument.

"Check," Curt Newton said and moved controls slightly. Then he asked, "Dust?"

"Definitely higher than average interstellar density now," Otto reported, from his own place at the wide instrument panel. "It'll thicken fast as we approach the main cloud."

Ezra looked at them—at the square, hovering metal case of the living brain, at the lithe eager android peering forward into the abyss with burning green eyes, at the giant imperceptible metal bulk of the robot.

Not men, no! He was out here in the great deeps, rushing toward the mightiest secret of infinity, with creatures unhuman, with—

Curt turned, and smiled briefly and wearily at him. And the clamoring panic in Ezra was suddenly gone. Why these were his oldest staunchest friends, unshakable, loyal and true.

He drew a long breath. "I don't mind telling you that it's nearly got me down."

"You've got worse coming," Curt said uncomfortably.

"We'll hit the main cloud soon."

"The cloud?"

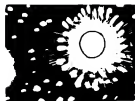
"The great cloud of cosmic dust that surrounds the Birth-

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place. That dust is born from the Birthplace—and flows out in mighty tides through our whole universe."

"To be born into new worlds?"

"Yes. Weiszacker fathomed that part of the cycle, long ago in the nineteen forties when he formulated his theory of the gathering of the cosmic dust into new planets."

Before them now rose a wall of Suns, glaring like cyclopean furnaces as the *Comet* seemingly crawled toward them. Almost it seemed that they could hear the clang and thunder of cosmic forges as their tiny craft approached and went between the flaming giants.

White and white flared a far-flung nebula to the left beyond that rampart of stars. But ahead there loomed farther still the black cloud that now seemed to be eating up the universe with jaws of darkness as they steadily approached it.

"No sign of any other ship outside the cloud," Otho reported coolly. "Our detectors won't range inside it of course."

"They had too big a start," Curt said broodingly. "Too many days. Garrard and the other must already have been on the world of the Watchers for some time."

"Unless the whirls wrecked them," Otho suggested.

"Wishful thinking," Curt said. "We ran the whirls and so could they."

Simon said, "Curtis, you will not go into the shrine of the Watchers again?"

Curt Newton did not look at him. "I'll have to if that's where Garrard is."

"You don't have to, Curtis. We three could go."

Now, Curt looked at Simon, his tanned face set and unreadable. "You don't trust me with the power of the Watchers?"

"You know what that power almost did to you before. It is for you to say."

Curt looked ahead and said doggedly, "I am not afraid and I will go in there after him."

Ezra Gurney, puzzled by the tension between them, asked, "Who are the Watchers?"

"They have been dead for ages," Curt said slowly. "But long ago they penetrated the Birthplace and conquered its secret and set up instruments to wield its powers. It's why we have come. Garrard must not use those instruments."

"Nobody must use them," said Simon.

Curt said nothing to that.

Gurney, looking ahead, saw the black cloud widening out across the starry universe like a great tide of doom, steadily blotting out the stars. A fitting cosmic shroud for the greatest of cosmic secrets, he thought. Its fringes engulfed bright stars that shone wanly through the dimness like dying eyes.

"This dust," said Simon, "is newborn matter, spawned by the Birthplace and pumped outward by pressure of radiation to flow out to the whole universe."

"And the—the secret itself—is inside?"

"Yes."

There was no moment when the *Comet* plunged suddenly within the cloud. Rather the dust thickened steadily until all about the flying ship was a deepening haze, deepest and darkest ahead but drawing more and more veils behind them so that the stars back there shone like smothered wick-fires.

The ship began to tremble as it encountered flowing spatial currents of denser dust. Struts and girders protested with slight creakings and then more loudly. They strapped into the recoil-chairs at Curt's orders.

"Here it comes," said Grag in loud complaint. "I remember last time almost every bone in my body was broken."

Otho laughed. He started a caustic retort but had no time to voice it.

To Gurney the *Comet* seemed suddenly to have crashed. The tell-tales on the panel went crazy and the recoil-chairs screamed in outrage as the ship was batted through the haze by unseen giant hands.

There was nothing they could do but hang on. There was nothing even for Curt to do. The automatic pilot and stabilizers had to do it all now or they were finished.

The mechanisms functioned staunchly. Again and again they snatched the buffeted little ship out of raging eddies of dust-currents and hurled it forward again. Now the whole hull was creaking and groaning from constantly changing stresses and the hiss of dust against its plates became a rising and falling roar.

Ezra Gurney felt a quaking dread. He had already seen too much, had come too far. Now he felt that a universe become sentient and hostile was wrathfully repelling them from its hidden heart, from its supreme secret.

Beating heart of the universe, fiery womb that spawned the stuff of worlds, awesome epicenter of cosmos!

The *Comet* fought forward, relentlessly impelled by its own mechanical brains, until the dust began to thin. It tore onward, still buffeted by swirling currents and drenched by radiation. And now, ahead, Ezra saw a vast hazy space inside the denser blackness of the cloud. And far away in this inner space, looming in vague gigantic splendor . . .

"Good God!" said Ezra Gurney and it was a prayer. "Then that—that . . ."

Curt Newton's eyes were alight with a strange glow. "Yes—the Birthplace."

The hazy space within the denser cloud was vast. And at its center bulked and gleamed and shifted an enigmatic glory—a colossal spinning spiral of white radiance. Its whirling arms spanned millions of miles and it uttered cosmic lightnings of radiation that lanced out through the haze.

Beating heart of the universe, fiery womb that spawned the stuff of worlds, awesome epicenter of cosmos! Cloaked and shrouded by the dense black cloud of its own making, safe behind its ramparts of terrible whirlpools and the wild tide-runs of untamed matter fresh from creation, it flamed across its millions of miles of space, shaped like a spiral nebula, spinning, whirling, sending forth its seed to the farthest corners of the galaxy.

And to Ezra Gurney, cowering in his seat and staring at that far-off misty glory, it seemed that the eyes of men were not meant to see nor their minds to comprehend this shining Birthplace. "Surely," he whispered, "surely we're not going into that!"

Curt Newton nodded. He had still that strange look in his eyes, a look almost mystic, as though he could see beyond the wonder and the glory of the Birthplace to its innermost secret heart and glimpse there the hidden laws by which it worked and carried out its destiny.

"Yes," said Curt, "we're going in." He leaned forward over the controls, his face bathed in the misty radiance so that it seemed not his familiar face at all but the countenance of a being half god-like with the strange light flickering in his eyes.

"You see how it is, Ezra?" he asked. "How it spins like a great centrifuge, sucking in the spent energy of Suns and whirling it in currents of incalculable strength until, in some utterly undreamable way, the energy coagulates into electrons and protons which are thrown off in never-ending streams from the rim of the vortex."

"They form the shining haze that fills this hollow around the Birthplace. Then, farther out, they unite to form the atoms of cosmic dust. The pressure of radiation forces them on across the galaxy. And out of them new worlds are made."

Ezra Gurney shivered. He did not speak. "Curtis!" Simon's voice was loud with a kind of warning and Curt Newton started, leaning back in his seat and turning again to the controls of the *Comet*. His face had tightened and his eyes were veiled.

And the ship sped on across that vast hollow in the heart of the dark cloud. And swift as its flight was it seemed only to creep slowly, slowly, toward the misty wheel of radiance. Pale witch-fires danced along its hull, growing brighter until the metal was enwrapped in veils of flame, tenuous, cold and having about them an eerie quality of life. The *Comet* was double-shielded against the radiation but even so Ezra Gurney could feel the echoes of that terrible force in his own flesh.

The flaming arms of the Birthplace reached wider and wider across space. The radiance deepened, became a supernal brilliance that seared the flinching eyeballs. The ship began to be shaken now and again by subtle tremors as the farthest edges of out-thrown currents touched it and passed by.

Ezra shut his teeth hard to keep from screaming. He had been driven once too close to the Sun and he had looked hard into the depths of the atomic furnace that was about to swallow him. He had not then known one tenth of the fear that he knew now.

Slitting his eyes against the glare he could make out the central sphere from which the spiral arms curved out, a gigantic vortex of flaming force, the wheel-hub of the galaxy. The *Comet* was plunging straight toward it and there was nothing he could do to stop it, nothing . . .

Curt sent the ship driving in between two of the sweeping arms. Tidal-waves, torrents of energy picked them up and flung them, a leaf in the cosmic millrace, toward the grip of a curving arm that burned and seethed with all the ultimate fires of hell. And Curt fought the controls and tore away again, heading in, heading in . . .

The central sphere of force loomed up like a wall of flame higher than all the skies of space, and then they were in it.

It was as though a million Suns had exploded. The force and fire took the *Comet* and whirled it tumbling away through a blind and terrible violence. Ezra sagged half-conscious in his seat and he thought that he had come a long, long way to die. No ship, no body, could live for long in this.

The forces of the cosmic centrifuge would tear their substance, power it to atoms and then still down into the fine raw stuff of atoms, send it out to join with the black dust, to begin the timeless pilgrimage across the empty spaces, to be built at last into the foundations of some new world to circle an alien Sun. Human, robot and android, they would all be one in the end.



The *Comet* crashed suddenly clear of that hellish tempest of light and force into quiet space. Into a space enclosed by the spinning central sphere of the Birthplace itself, a calm at the very center of cosmic storm.

Dazzled, half-stunned, Ezra heard Simon saying, "In here at the center is only one world—the world of the Watchers, where—"

Curt Newton, leaning forward, interrupted with a strange low cry.

"Simon, look! Look! There are other worlds here now—worlds and Suns and—" His voice seemed strangled by a surprise and terror too great for utterance.

Ezra strained desperately to regain use of his dazzled eyes. As they began to clear he too peered tauntly forward. At first what he saw did not seem too terrifying. Here, in the wide calm space at the heart of the Birthplace, there was a cluster of Suns and planets.

Ruby Suns, flaring like new blood, green and white and somber smoky-gold Suns! Planets and moons that circled the changing Suns in sweeping trains, themselves ever changing! Comets that shot in living light between the worlds, meteor swarms rushing and wheeling an astronomical phantasmagoria enclosed within this comparatively little space!

"You said there were no worlds but one here," Ezra began, bewildered.

"There were none," Curt's face was deathly, and something in it struck at Ezra's heart. "There were none but that little blue world—that alone."

Ezra glimpsed it at the center of the strange, close-packed cluster—a little blue planet that was a geometrically perfect sphere.

"The powers of the Watchers are there—the instruments by which they could tap the Birthplace itself," Curt was saying hoarsely. "And Garrand has been there with those instruments for days."

A comprehension so monstrous that his mind recoiled from it came to Ezra Gurney. "You mean that Garrand . . ."

He could not finish, could not say it. It was not a thing that could be said in any sane universe.

Curt Newton said it. "Garrand, by tapping the Birthplace, has created the Suns and worlds and comets and meteors of that cluster. He has fallen victim to the old allurements, the strongest in the universe."

"As you almost fell victim once!" Simon Wright warned.

"Can a man make worlds?" Ezra felt shaken and sick inside. "Curt, no—this thing—"

"One who can harness the Birthplace can create at will!" Curt exclaimed. "And the instruments of the Watchers do harness it!"

A kind of madness had come over him. Under his hands the *Comet* leaped forward at terrible speed. Ezra heard him talking, whether to the others or himself he never knew.

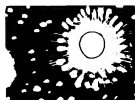
"There is a balance of forces—always a balance! It cannot be tampered with too much. The Watchers left a warning, a plain and dreadful warning."

The ship rushed forward toward the distant small blue world, careening wildly through the unholy stars and worlds and comets whose creation had blasphemed against the natural universe.

Powers of the Watchers

The blue world shimmered in the light of the monstrous aurora, a perfect jewel, with no height of mountain nor roughness of natural growth to mar its symmetry. Its surface showed a gloss that made Ezra think of porcelain or the deep gleam of polished lapis.

"The Watchers made it long ago," said Curt. "They made it out of the forces of the Birthplace and it was their outpost in this universe, where they studied the secrets of creation. There exists a city . . ."



The *Comet* sped low across the curving plain. For a time there was nothing but the blank expanse of blue—what was it, glass or rock or jewel-stone or some substance new in the universe? Above them the little suns with their planets wheeled and shone, laced about with the fire of comets, and above those again was the golden sky of the Birthplace. Curt's face, bent forward toward the blue horizon, was intense and pale and somehow alien.

"There it is!" cried Otho, and Curt nodded. Ahead there were the tips of slender spires flashing in the light and a gleam and glow of faceted surfaces that made a web of radiance like the aura sometimes seen in dreams. The spires lifted into graceful height, shaped themselves into the form of a city.

Walls of the same translucent blue enclosed the towers and in the center, rising high above them all, there was a citadel, a cathedral-form as massive and as delicate as the castles that sometimes stand upon the tops of clouds on Earth. And it was dead, the blue and graceful city. The walls, the streets, the flying arches that spanned the upper levels of the towers, all were silent and deserted.

"Garrand's ship," said Curt and Ezra saw it on the plain before the city, an ugly dark intruder on this world that had not been made for men.

Curt set the *Comet* down beside it. There was air on this planet, for the Watchers had been oxygen-breathers even though they were not human. The lock of Garrand's ship stood open but there was no life nor movement that Curt could see.

"It seems deserted," he said, "but we'd better make sure." Ezra roused himself. He went out with the others and

somehow the mere act of moving and the possibility of facing a human and comprehensible danger was a relief, almost a pleasure. He walked beside Curt with Otho beyond him. Their boots slipped and rang on the glassy surface. Apart from that there was no sound. The city brooded and was still.

They went through the open airlock into the other ship. There did not seem to be anything to fear, but they moved with the caution of long habit. Ezra found that he was waiting, hoping for action, for attack. He needed some escape valve for the terrors that had grown within him during this flight into the heart of the universe. But the narrow corridors were empty and nothing stirred behind the bulkhead doors.

Then, in the main cabin, they found a man.

He was sitting on the padded bench formed by the tops of the lockers along one wall. He did not move when they came in except to lift his head and look at them. He was a big man, of a breed that Ezra Gurney knew very well, having fought them all his life across the Solar System. But the hardness had gone out of him now. The strong lines of his face had sagged and softened and his eyes held only hopelessness and fear. He had been drinking, but he was not drunk.

"You're too late," he said. "Way too late."

Curt went and stood before him. "You're Herrick," he said. "Are you alone?"

"Oh, yes," said Herrick, "I'm alone. There were Sperry and Forbin but they're dead now." Herrick had not shaved for some time. The black stubble on his jaw was flecked with white. He ran his hand across it and his fingers trembled. "I wouldn't be here now," he said, "but I couldn't run the whirls alone. I couldn't take this ship clear back to Earth alone. I couldn't do anything but sit and wait."

Curt said, "Where's Garrand?"

Herrick laughed. It was not pleasant laughter. "You know where he is. Go in and get him. Make him come out. That's how Sperry and Forbin died, trying to make him. I don't know why I'm alive myself. I don't know if I want to be alive after what I've seen."

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He got up. It was hard for him to rise, hard to stand. It was as though fear had eaten the bones away inside him, dissolved the strength from his muscles, leaving him only a hulk, a receptacle for terror. His eyes burned at them.

"You know me," he said. "You know my kind. You can guess why I came with Garrand to get the secret of the Birthplace, what I was going to do with it afterward. I didn't figure Garrand would get in my way. I needed his brains, all right, but there would come a time when I wouldn't need them anymore." He made a gesture, as of brushing away an insect with his hand. "As easy as that." He began to laugh again and it was more weeping than laughter.

"Stop it!" said Curt and Herrick stopped quite obediently. He looked at Curt as though a thought had just come to him, creeping through the fear-webs that shrouded his brain.

"You can get me out of here," he said. There was no threat in his voice, only pleading, the voice of a man caught in quicksand and crying for release. "It's no use going after Garrand. He'll die in there anyway. He won't eat or sleep, he's gone beyond those things, but whatever he thinks he is he's human and he'll die. Just go! Take me aboard your ship and go!"

"No," said Curt.

Herrick sat down again on the bench. "No," he whispered. "You wouldn't. You're as mad as he is."

Simon said, "Curtis . . ."

He had remained in the shadowy background, listening, but now he came forward and spoke and Curt turned on him.

"No!" he said again. "I can't go away and leave a madman there to play with the forces of the Birthplace till he dies!"

Simon was silent for a time and then he said slowly, "There is truth in what you say but only part of it. And I am sorry, Curtis—for I am no more proof against this madness than you. Even less, perhaps, than you.

"I shall stay out here with Grag to guard the ships and Herrick." His lens-like eyes turned upon Ezra Gurney. "I think that you, of all of us, will resist the lure more strongly. You are like Herrick, a man of your hands—and Herrick, who came to steal the secret, felt only terror when he found it."

He said no more but Ezra knew what he meant. Simon was giving Curt Newton into his hands to save him from some destruction which Ezra did not understand. There was a coldness around Ezra's heart and a sickness in his belly and in his mind a great wish that he had never left Earth.

Curt said to Herrick, "Go to my ship and wait. When we leave you'll go with us."

Herrick shook his head. His eyes lifted slowly to Curt Newton's and dropped again. He said, "You'll never leave."

Ezra left the ship with Curt and Otho and he was sorry that Herrick had said those last three words.

They walked again across the ringing glassy plain, this time toward the city wall and the tall gateway that was in it. The leaves of the portal stood open and there was a look about them as though they had not been touched or closed for more ages than Ezra could think about. He and Otho passed through them, following Curt. Beyond, at a little distance, were two dark statues facing each other across the way. Ezra looked at them and caught his breath in sharply.

"The Watchers?" he whispered. "Were they like that? But what were they then?"

Otho said, "They came from another universe. Simon thought they must have been liquescent from the formless structure of their bodies."

Out of each amorphous figure stared two round yellow eyes, full of light from the flowing sky and uncannily lifelike. Ezra shuddered and hurried by, glancing as he did so at the strangely inscribed letters upon the bases of the statues. He assumed that that was the warning Curt had referred to and he did not want to enquire too closely into it.

"Go quietly," Curt said. "Two men have already died here. We want to get as close to Garrand as we can before he knows we're here."

Curt looked upward to where the little suns swam in the golden haze, the little suns that could create havoc in this cosmic womb where only the seed of matter belonged.

"Where is he?" demanded Ezra for the city was utterly dead and still. Curt pointed to the citadel.

"In there."

They made their way as silently as they could along the blue translucent street. High above them the slender spires made soft bell-notes where the wind touched them and the crystal spans trummed like muted harps. And the shimmering castle loomed close before them and the strange stars sparkled in the golden sky. Ezra Gurney was afraid.

There was a portal, tall and simply made, with an unknown symbol cut above it. They passed it, treading softly, and stood within a vast cathedral vault that soared upward until the tops of the walls were lost in a golden haze and Ezra realized that it was open to the sky. The floor was of the same blue substance as the city and in the center of it, under the open vault, was a massive oblong block almost like a gigantic altar except that its top was set with hundreds of little, shining keys. Beside this block stood Garrand. He was not looking at it nor at the two men and the android who had entered. He was looking upward into that distant sky and through the opening Ezra could see the glittering of stars. Garrand was smiling.

Curt Newton walked out across the floor.

"Don't come any closer," said Garrand mildly. "Just where you are—that's close enough."

Curt stopped. Otho had begun to edge away along the curve of the wall very slowly, like a drifting shadow. Ezra stood a little behind Curt and to one side.

Garrand turned toward them and for the first time Ezra saw his face quite clearly. Unshaven and deathly white, its cheeks and temples sunken with hunger and exhaustion, its eyes dark and burning, there was a beauty about it that had never been there before, something sublime and glorious and calm, as a sea is calm or a frozen river, with the potentials of destruction sleeping in it. And Ezra understood the danger that Simon had spoken of in regard to Curt. He understood now what the power that was here could do to a man.

"So, after all, you followed me," Garrand said. "Well, it doesn't matter now." He stepped behind the block that was like an altar, so that it was between him and Curt.

Curt said quietly, "You must leave here, Garrand. You'll have to leave some time, you know. You're only human."

"Am I?" Garrand laughed. His hand lightly caressed the bank of little shining keys. "Am I? I was once. I was a little physicist who thought adding to scientific knowledge supremely important and I stole and risked my life to come here for more knowledge." His eyes lit up. "I came searching for a scientific secret and I found the source of godhead!"

"So now, because you've tampered with the Watchers' powers and tapped the Birthplace, you're a god?" Curt's tone was ironic but Ezra could see the sweat standing out on his forehead.

Garrand took no offence. He was armored by an egocentric emotion so great that he merely smiled wearily and said, "You can go now—all of you. I dislike chattering. I dislike it so much that I will quite willingly call destruction in here to engulf you unless you go."

His fingers had ceased straying, had come to rest on certain keys. Ezra Gurney felt a slow freezing of his flesh. He whispered hoarsely. "You'll have to kill him, Curt."

He knew the swiftness with which Newton could draw and fire the weapon at his belt. But Curt made no move.

"Can I fire into the bank of controls?" Curt muttered. "Otho's speed is our only chance."

He flung up his hand, his fingers crooked. He said loudly, "Garrand, I warn you—"



His gesture had been both a feint to draw attention and a signal. A signal that sent Otho lunging toward the oblong altar.

The phenomenal swiftness of the android, the reaction speed of nerves and muscles that were not human, made Otho's movement almost blurring to the eye. But Garrand saw and with a low cry he pressed the keys.

To Ezra, in the next moment, the air around them seemed suddenly charged with power. The golden haze spun about him, darkened, thickened, all in a heartbeat. He felt the imminent materialization of an agency of destruction drawn from the great matrix of force about them.

He glimpsed through the thickening haze Otho pulling Garrand back from the altar. He saw Curt leaping in, his face desperate and raising the depressed keys.

And Ezra felt the half-materialized shadowy force around him melting back into nothingness. "What—" he stammered, still standing frozen.

"Death," said Curt. "As to the form of it who knows but Garrand? Anyway, it's over now." His voice was unsteady and his hands shook on the keys. He looked down. Garrand had gone limp in Otho's arms. Ezra thought at first that he was dead and then he saw the shallow breathing, the faint twitching of the mouth.

"Hunger and exhaustion," said Curt. "Strain. He was already at the end of his rope. Get him back to the ship, Otho, and have Simon take care of him."

Otho lifted the unconscious man without effort but he did not yet move away. "Aren't you coming, Curt?"

"Not yet." He glanced upward through the opening at the brilliant stars that swarmed where no stars ought to be. "I can't leave this imbalance at the heart of the Birthplace. The Watchers were careful about that. They built their one small planet at the exact center of stress, where it wouldn't upset anything. But those creations of Garrand's—I don't dare leave them here, Otho."

Still Otho did not move and Curt said, "Go on, Otho. Garrand needs help."

Slowly and reluctantly the android turned and as he did so he looked at Ezra, a look of warning, a pleading look. Then he went out, carrying Garrand.

Curt Newton bent over the keys. "I haven't forgotten," he whispered to himself. "How could anyone ever forget?" He touched the gleaming keys, not pressing them, just touching them lightly and feeling the power that was in them, the unimaginable control of matter.

Ezra said hoarsely, "What are you going to do?"

Curt looked upward to where the little suns swam in the golden haze, the little suns that could create havoc in this cosmic womb where only the seed of matter belonged.

"Watch," he said. "I am going to dissolve what Garrand created."

Ezra watched. Slowly, carefully, Curt pressed a certain pattern on the keys and around a ruby star waves and bands of golden force began to flicker like faint auroras. They grew and strengthened and became streams of raw electrons, pouring their substance into the little Sun.

Ezra shielded his eyes, but not soon enough. The star had become a nova, but without the second, the collapsed stage of novae. The fury of electronic force launched upon it from outside in this universal vortex of such forces had swept away each fragment of the exploding atoms to return them to the parent cloud.

The ruby star had ceased to exist and its worlds had vanished with it.

Swifter now, more surely, Curt's hands flashed across the keys. And Ezra Gurney cowered beside the altar, blinded, stunned, shaken by the savage explosions of far-distant matter, risen and burst apart.

How long he crouched there while the great lights flared in the sky and the cosmic hammers beat he never knew. But there came a time when everything was still and he looked up and saw Curt standing there with his hands motionless on the keys and his head strained back so that he could search the farthest reaches of the sky.

He spoke and Curt did not answer. He touched him and spoke again, and it was like speaking to a statue except that under his fingers he could feel the subtle tremors of Curt's hard flesh, the taut quivering.

"Curt!" he cried out. And Curt very slowly lowered his head and looked at him with a kind of amazement in his eyes, as though he had forgotten Ezra Gurney.

"Is it finished, Curt?"

"Yes. It's finished."

"Then come away."

Newton's gaze, the unfamiliar gaze that did not see small things like men but looked on larger distances, slipped away to the banks of keys and upward to the sky again.

"In a moment," he said. "In just a moment."

Two red bars burned across the bones of his cheeks and the rest of his face was like marble. Ezra saw in it the beginning of the exaltation, the terrible beauty that had marked the face of Garrand. Curt smiled and the sinews of his hands moved delicately as he stroked his fingers across the keys.

"The worlds that I could make," he whispered. "Garrand was only a little man. I could create things he never dreamed of."

"Curt!" cried Ezra in a panic. "Come away!" But his voice was swallowed up in dreams and Curt whispered very softly, "I wouldn't keep them. I would dissolve them afterward. But I could create..."

His fingers were forming a pattern on the keys. Ezra looked down at his gnarled old hands and knew that they were not strong enough. He looked at his gun and knew that he could not use it in any way. Searching desperately for a way to pierce through the dreams he cried, "Could you create another Earth?"

For awhile he was not sure that Curt had heard him, not sure but that he was beyond hearing. Then a vaguely startled look came into Curt's eyes and he said, "What?"

"Could you create another Earth, Curt? Could you put the mountains and the seas together and build the cities and fill them with men and women and the voices of children? Could you create another Otho or Grag or Simon?"

Curt slowly looked down at his fingers, curved and hungry on the waiting keys, and a kind of horror flashed across his face. He snatched his hands away and spun around, turning his back to the altar. He looked sick, and ashamed, but the dreams were no longer shadowing his face, and Ezra began to breathe again.

"Thanks, Ezra," he said hoarsely. "Now let's go. Let's go while I can."

The black cloud lay behind them and the Comet fled away from it like a frightened thing, back through the great blazing clusters of Suns that had now no terrors for them. Curt Newton sat silently at the controls and his face was so brooding that Ezra Gurney did not venture to speak.

Ezra looked ahead because he did not want to look back into the main cabin. He knew that what Simon was doing there was perfectly harmless and utterly necessary but there was something so uncanny about it that he did not want to see it being done.

He had looked in once and seen Simon hovering over the strange projector that Grag and Otho had rigged above the heads of the drugged unconscious Garrand and Herrick. He had come away from there quickly.

He sat unspeaking beside Curt, watching the great clusters

wheel slowly past them until at last Simon Wright came gliding into the control-room.

"It is done," said Simon. "Garrand and Herrick will not wake for many hours. When they do they won't remember."

Curt looked at him. "You're sure that you expurged every memory of the Birthplace?"

"Absolutely sure. I used the scanner to block every memory-path on that subject—and checked by questioning them hypnotically. They know nothing of the Birthplace. You'll have to have a story ready for them."

Curt nodded. "We picked them up out here in deep space when their ship cracked up in cosmic ray research. That fits the circumstances—they'll never doubt it."

Ezra shivered a little. Even now the blocking of part of a man's memories, the taking away forever of a bit of his experience, seemed an eerie thing to do.

Curt Newton saw his shiver and understood it. He said, "It doesn't harm them, Ezra—and it's necessary."

"Very necessary, if the secret of the Birthplace is not to get out again," said Simon.

There was a little silence among them and the ship crawled on and on through the cosmic glare and gloom. Ezra saw that the somber shadow on Newton's face deepened as he looked out through the wilderness of Suns and nebulae toward the far, far spark of Sol.

"But someday," Curt said slowly, "someday not too far in the future, many men will be pushing out through these spaces. They'll find the Birthplace sooner or later. And then what?"

Simon said, "We will not be here when that happens."

"But they'll do it. And what will happen when they do?"

Simon had no answer for that nor had Ezra Gurney. And Curt spoke again, his voice heavy with foreboding.

"I have sometimes thought that life, human life, intelligent life, is merely a deadly agent by which a stellar system achieves its own doom in a cosmic cycle far vaster and stranger than anyone has dreamed. For see—stars and planets are born from primal nothingness and they cool and the cooling worlds spawn life and life grows to ever higher levels of intelligence and power until . . ."

There was an ironical twist to Curt's lips as he paused and then went on " . . . until the life of that world becomes intelligent enough to tap the energies of the cosmos! When that happens is it inevitable that fallible mortals should use those energies so disastrously that they finally destroy their own worlds and stars? Are life and intelligence merely a lethal seed planted in each universe, a seed that must inevitably destroy that universe?"

Simon said slowly, "That is a terrible thought, Curtis. But I deny its inevitability. Long ago the Watchers found the Birthplace, yet they did not try to use its powers."

"We are not like the Watchers, we men," Curt said bitterly. "You saw what it did to Garrand and to me."

"I know," said Simon. "But perhaps men will be as wise as the Watchers were by the time they find the Birthplace. Perhaps they too will then be powerful enough to renounce power. We can only hope."



THE WIDOW FIGLER

Continued from page 21

"It means Gardens, Inc., is permanently enjoined from making further inquiries; there's no finding of fact that you have the chip in possession. For all the record now shows, you may or may not have it. The corporation is just enjoined from harrassing you about it. It's a resolution the court analogized from the quarrel memory that I made the controlling process of the law suit, an accommodation that makes it possible for everybody to keep on living with each other."

"The judgement isn't going to be worth the printout paper as a precedent because it won't have the cachet of an appellate court. When the briefing computers pick it up, it'll look like the only way a litigant could invoke the principle would be to walk out with a functioning chip in place, and damn few ceramic mausoleum clients are going to have the tensile strength in their neurones to do that. Lots of law suits end this way, I'm afraid. Courts don't deal in justice, only in finality. Justice is a by-product." His lips parted over his teeth in not quite a smile. Joyous solemnity, he thought: let's hold that.

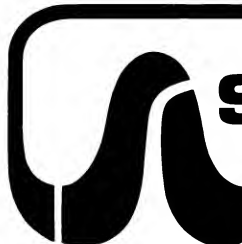
"So you're pleased, but at a low level? Not everything happened that you wanted?" She seemed to be interested in the answer.

Now the lawyer smiled full at his client. It was time to end the interview, before that sexuality by which he had been tugged and tumbled in the course of her case asserted itself in some positive and unprofessional fashion. Her check was on his blotter. Corky stood up as he said, "Oh no, I'm pleased, period. I did something few lawyers ever get away with: I won on total irrelevancy. Figler versus Ceramic Gardens is a case I shan't forget." He came around the corner of the desk. There was little she could do but leave.

At the door, she pulled on one white glove, turned and faced him. She had both the ceramic chip and her real-time self under full control, masked by her social smile. "Well," she said, "Thank you, for everything; and goodbye."

As he reached around her and opened the door, Mrs. Figler stepped toward him, placed one hand on his shoulder, one behind his head, and bent him down to be kissed. Corky had a standard of comparison, even though the ceramic memory was fading from his central nervous system. This kiss was like the last martini in the pitcher, dryer, cooler, less promise of infinite explosive power than the first, but comforting, and shyly inviting. When she slapped him and walked out the door, it was as if a brussels sprout instead of an olive had appeared at the bottom of the glass.

Corky was still chuckling and whistling an hour later as he straightened his desk. Well, he thought, you can't take every road life offers; but some of them are more tempting than others. He laughed ruefully as he rubbed his slapped cheek and felt, probably for the last time, the *scherzo* of FIGLER'S QUARREL rustle in his cortical grooves like the dying video tapes of yesteryear.



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SURVIVAL

Lee Killough

The banshee scream jerked Lieutenant Tanas Sky out of a sound sleep, but the first officer's reflexes were well-schooled. She was out of the bunk and halfway into her uniform, closing the diagonal touch seam of her tunic, before she became consciously aware of the alarm. Identification of the pattern was automatic: orange alert—a ship had entered maximum sensor range, a ship of undetermined identity and purpose.

Then suddenly she was fully awake, nerves crackling like high voltage wires, a tall figure pale as famine . . . lean, rawboned, lupine . . . with furnace-yellow eyes. She snatched on her boots.

Yfel, she thought hungrily. She settled her laser belt on her hip and spun toward the cabin door, which hissed open for her. She stepped through into the corridor and broke into a brisk jog. The lizards were clever and ruthless. Until now her military career had been wasted on police actions against pirates; she longed fiercely for a real engagement, for a kill she could take pride in. Let this be Yfel, she thought with a fervor akin to prayer. Let this be a warship.

Ahead, a stocky, four-armed crewman leaned against the bulkhead opposite the lifts. Her contemplation of Yfel ended in righteous indignation. What kind of behavior was this for a soldier during an alert?

"Crewman," Tanas snapped, "why aren't you at your post?"

The being jerked around, a dusky hue deepening the rusty pigmentation of his skin. He stammered, "I . . . ah . . . I am."

"Loitering at a lift?" She pointedly traced the engineering insignia on his collar with a long, accusing finger.

"I . . . ah . . ." Mental wheels ground ponderously. "Won't you be late to your post, mistress?"

"We're not discussing me, Crewman," Tanas said coldly.

He licked his lips. She let him sweat. In due course he would answer. She assumed he would be truthful. Lying, after all, took imagination. She was surprised to find one of his breed even trying. It was as unusual as seeing their stolid composure ruffled.

The engineering technician rolled his eyes. He met her icy gaze and grimaced. Broad multiple shoulders hunched helplessly.

Tanas' lip curled. Her people had never met a race yet with the backbone to stand up to them in a fight . . . only the Yfel, and even the lizards would one day be forced to recognize the superiority of Virinians.

"I'm putting you on report, Crewman," she said. "What's your—"

The scream of the alarm was interrupted by the intercom. "All officers will report to the briefing room. Repeat, all officers to the briefing room."

They would be on her heels, she knew, but keeping away from them did not bother her so much as wondering where she was going.

Tanas glanced up at the bulkhead speaker. Briefing room. Her breathing quickened. "We'll continue this later, Crewman," she said abruptly. "I trust you will have had sufficient time by then to fabricate a reasonable excuse for your behavior."

He looked down at the deck. "Yes, mistress."

She pushed past him, forgetting him as her mind raced ahead, speculating on the briefing. A tactical meeting, she wondered. At the corner, however, for reasons she could not quite explain, she felt compelled to stop and turn around. The technician remained where she had left him, only now he stared at the bulkhead with an expression of infinite patience.

A blue alert rang urgently in Tanas' head. The briefing was forgotten. Swinging around the corner, she flattened against the bulkhead and peered back cautiously.

The technician was no longer waiting. He must have moved the instant she disappeared from sight. A bulkhead panel stood loose and he was reaching into the circuitry behind it. He worked quickly, then slid the panel back into place and strode away.

Tanas followed, debating whether or not she should warn Captain Keilit of this suspicious behavior immediately. No, she decided, not yet. It was better to follow and watch until she discovered what the technician was up to.

Except he did not cooperate. Instead of revealing anything, after leaving the lifts he merely strolled, obviously going nowhere in particular. He appeared to be . . . waiting? Tanas frowned. Waiting for what?

"Attention all crew members," the intercom boomed.

Tanas halted, eyes narrowing sharply. The voice belonged to the second engineer, a Mordain. Since when did members of the servant races begin making announcements? First that technician behaved atypically and now this.

"This is Chief Nol Beren. My fellow slaves . . ." The voice carried suppressed excitement that sent a premonitory chill down Tanas' spine. ". . . this is not an orange alert; it is mutiny."

Tanas sucked in her breath. Impossible. They would not dare!

"The officers have been sealed on the bridge and in the briefing room. All power to the bridge has been cut. They're helpless."

Incredulity changed to anger. Tanas swore. The Mordain was a fool to think he could succeed with this. No Virinian was ever helpless and if Beren expected Captain Keilit to submit meekly to insubordination, the vermin was due for an unpleasant shock.

The second engineer's voice went on, "We have also shut down life-support to those sections."



There was more, rhetoric about being free men now and fighting to free others from the Virinian yoke of slavery, but Tanas barely heard it. Not waiting for a lift, she was scrambling up the nearest climb shaft for the bridge level. The captain would undoubtedly break free eventually, but without air there was no time for eventualities. She had to help him.

On the command level she raced past the briefing room without stopping. The captain must be freed first, then she could come back for the others.

She expected to hear the bridge crew trying to burn their way out with lasers, though it would have been a laborious process since the weapons were calibrated for flesh, not starcraft alloys. However, only silence greeted her. Even pressing her ear hard against the door, she could hear nothing.

"Captain," she shouted, hammering on the door with her fists. "Captain!"

Keilit's voice called back from the other side, "Number One?"

"Yes, sir. How are you?"

"Alive for the moment. Get us out," he ordered.

Tanas drew her laser. "Immediately."

The section of bulkhead adjacent to the door could be removed for access to its circuitry. Tanas did not have the keying device used to disengage the panel but she knew where the lock points were. Narrowing her beam to minimum diameter and boosting to maximum power, she aimed at the first corner and fired. The paint blackened and the metal beneath began glowing, but it did not melt. She held the beam steady, hissing impatiently between her teeth. Their next communicate with HQ was going to include a forceful suggestion for more powerful hand weapons.

The lock point glowed brighter . . . finally sparked and melted. She aimed at the next corner.

Beren was still talking, but reaching the end of his speech. "Will you stand with us or against us? Will you choose the safety of slavery or the danger, and rewards, of being free men?"

Tanas sneered.

Another voice spoke excitedly, "Beren, all of them aren't trapped. Sky is still running around somewhere."

There was a curse. "That she-wolf," the second engineer spat.

The second point burned through. She fired hurriedly at another.

"Find her," Beren ordered. "She'll probably be trying to free the others. Start with the bridge and work out."

"Get off your hands out there," the captain snarled through the door. "The air in here won't last forever."

"Yes, sir!" Tanas fired back. She vowed that when this was over she would personally break Beren in two, one bone at a time.

The constant drain of energy was lowering the laser's charge. This third corner was melting much more slowly than the others. It seemed an eternity until the panel spit a shower of sparks and burned through. Only one corner yet to go. With her mouth thinning grimly, she focused the weakening beam on the last corner and listened for footsteps up any of the corridors which reached outward like spokes from the bridge. She estimated four minutes as the minimum time to open the bridge: three to burn out the lock point, a half minute to slide the panel aside, the remaining half minute to operate the manual release. Not long, except . . . how long before the mutineers arrived?

She found out too soon. From the direction of the starboard lifts came the sound of booted feet running hard. Tanas kept her beam fixed unwaveringly on the lock point. It was glowing bright yellow, almost white.

The captain must have been standing with his ear against the door. He shouted urgently, "Number One!"

"I'm working," Tanas replied. "Almost through."

If those Gnathon marsh crawlers took just a while longer getting here . . . She resisted the urge to look up the corridor and stared instead at the beam burning slowly into the panel. The footsteps bore down on her. She kept working.

Suddenly the bulkhead beside her ear scorched. She moved fast, then—leaping aside and whirling half-crouched, sweeping the laser beam into the eyes of the leading crewman.

He screamed and staggered backward into the others, clawing at his face in agony. Tanas did not wait for the momentary confusion to end. Jamming the laser into its holster, she sprinted up the corridor leading to the port lifts. They would be on her heels, she knew, but keeping away from them did not bother her so much as wondering where she was going. Aimless running only wasted time, and every lost minute meant less air left on the bridge. She had to find an objective, formulate a strategy.

Above her, the intercom came to life. "She was trying to open the bridge. We stopped her but she got away. Elzar and Kas are after her."

Beren's voice replied crisply, "Post guards by the bridge and briefing room and on all lifts and climb shafts. Try to keep her on that level. Lori."

"Lori here."

"Organize search parties for levels above the bridge. I'll see to the lower levels."

"Understood."

Tanas bit her lip. These corridors were going to be dangerous in a matter of minutes. There would be no place for her to hide and think. She skidded into a cross-corridor, thinking furiously. The mutineers were bare meters behind her. Evasive action was in order, but . . . where?

Ahead, a vertical row of bars gleamed on the bulkhead. Tanas grinned. Reaching high, she caught at one, swung onto the ladder and shot up it in a smooth, continuous motion. Keeping her chin tucked, she smashed the back of her shoulders into the overhead and forced the access trap. Tanas scrambled through the opening. She slapped the panel back into place behind her. Crouching on it, she listened intently. Seconds later she heard the pursuit pass beneath her without pausing. She sat back on her heels and let out her breath. Evasion successful. And now . . .

She considered her bulk confines speculatively. Between-decks could be reached only from the corridors. The cabins themselves were solid, air-tight, designed to serve as life capsules in case the hull were breached during battle. Only now it appeared the purpose of the safety measure could be murderously perverted.

Anger threatened to interfere with logical thought. The Virinians were rulers, she reflected, trying to bring her frustration under control. They were overlords of three hundred worlds. It was impossible that this Beren and his henchmen could trap and kill them with such ridiculous ease.

But however incredible, the fact remained they had, and short of killing the entire non-Virinian crew single-handed, she admitted with reluctance, the chances of freeing the officers herself were slim. What she needed was a key, a way to force Beren into releasing them for her. Now, where was the creature vulnerable?

After a moment of reflection she knew. A wolfish grin spread slowly across her face.

On hands and knees she crawled rapidly through the darkness. Mordath and every other subject planet had been conquered because their people were weak and sentimental, letting emotion over-rule what they might know intellectually to be a necessary course of action. She could use that characteristic against the second engineer.

She felt her way confidently through the maze of cables and conduits. As first officer she had made it her business to know every square centimeter of the ship's construction.

That included learning the one link between levels the mutineers were apparently overlooking; vertical conduits. Safety grids blocked them between levels, but the laser could deal with those.

Ahead, a luminous circle marked the shaft. Groping for the rungs, she began climbing. Beren's weakness was two levels up, in the quartermaster section.

The alloy of the grids was soft, but the weakening laser cut them with difficulty and finally failed altogether midway through the last grid. Cursing, Tanas braced herself across the shaft and kicked upward at the grid until she managed to bend it where the laser had cut and work open a hole barely large enough for her to squeeze through. She left some skin and pieces of uniform behind. Nursing her wounds, she finally dropped from between-decks on the quartermaster level, first making sure the corridor was clear.

Balancing the laser lightly in her hand as though it still carried a charge, she slid around the corner and into the quartermaster's office with a dry, "Good evening, mistresses."

The three women in the cabin whirled toward the door, eyes widening. One started to reach for the intercom.

Tanas swung the laser on her. "I wouldn't," she said.

The woman drew back, bluffed.

"How did you—" began a stocky girl with a ruddy complexion.

"Did you really think I would be easily cornered?" Tanas interrupted. She regarded the girl with a half-smile. "Crewwoman Zenna Vanser, I believe?"

The girl nodded warily.

"You're our clever master Beren's woman."

The girl did not answer, but her face tightened and paled.

Until now her military career had been wasted on police actions against pirates; she longed fiercely for a real engagement, for a kill she could take pride in.

Tanas' smile broadened. "I felt sure you would be here rather than assisting in the search for me. You servant races have a peculiar custom of regarding females as a weaker sex. Ridiculous and inefficient, of course, but that's why you're servants and we're overlords. Come along, Crewwoman." Her fingers closed around Zenna's wrist like a manacle.

The girl's startled gasp was just short of a scream. "What do you want with me?"

"Not your company," Tanas waved the laser at the other women. "I suggest you sit down quietly until well after I've gone. I'll hear you if you use the intercom, and—" Her voice grew heavily sardonic. "—if I do, I could be so startled by the sound of your voice I might accidentally injure Crewwoman Vanser."

The women's eyes smoldered but they obediently sat. Tanas backed into the corridor, pulling the girl with her, and headed for the nearest section of crew's quarters. She chose a cabin at random and, shoving the girl into a chair, locked the door behind them. Only then did she holster the laser.

She said bluntly, "Beren is a fool to think he can succeed with this."

To Tanas' astonishment, the girl did not cringe. She smiled instead, her eyes glinting with a strange, intoxicated light. "I'd say he seems to be doing so."

"You're all committing suicide by following him," Tanas snapped.

The girl came back passionately, "At least we'll die free."

Tanas sneered. "Freedom is a myth. No one is ever free. I command you. My superiors command me. The Virinian leaders are controlled by their subordinates by the threat of being deposed if they become too unpopular. We're limited by heredity and social conditioning; we're chained by our own ignorance and fears."





"Unless we choose *not* to be," the crewwoman snapped back. "That's what freedom is: choices, my *own* choices, not yours or some other bully with a bigger weapon than mine."

"You can make your own choices *now*," Tanas said. "Mutiny is treason. If this succeeds you can't make planetfall anywhere without risking capture and execution. Every ship in space will be looking for you. If you escape, reprisal will be taken on your families planetside. Think about that," Tanas suggested. "How long can you tolerate living hunted before you turn on your precious Beren and start hating him? How long before the crew does?" She paused wasteful minutes—what was the air on the bridge like now?—to let the girl contemplate her words before continuing, "You can avoid such an unpleasant end, however, if you choose."

The girl arched a brow. "Oh?" she asked on a long, rising note.

No use, Tanas reflected angrily, but she would try anyway. "Call Beren and ask him to surrender. I'll personally see that he's given clemency. At worst, he'll be imprisoned for a couple of years, then exiled to a colony. You'll be allowed to join him."

The girl's lip curled. "Save your generosity; I won't help you."

Tanas's vicious backhand lifted the girl out of the chair and sent her sprawling. Her voice crackled like splintering ice. "Yes, you will, voluntarily or with my laser at your throat, but you'll help!"

The girl looked up defiantly, fingering the reddening mark on her face. "I'd sooner mate a slime worm."

It took every effort of will for Tanas to keep from slamming her foot through the girl's face. She stared murderously at the girl for a long moment. So stronger persuasion was necessary. Fine. Snapping around, she strode to the sanitary facilities and began filling the wash basin with water.

"These games would normally be most entertaining, Crewwoman, but unfortunately . . ." Tanas slid a covert glance at the chronometer and fought down panic. "Unfortunately I'm in something of a rush."

The girl watched the basin fill, pupils dilating until her eyes looked black. Cautiously, she began sliding toward the door.

Tanas, anticipating the break, was there first. The girl screamed and fought, but she was no match for Tanas. While one of the first officer's hand held the girl's arms behind her back, the other wound firmly in Zenna's hair. Struggling, the girl was dragged to the basin and her head forced into it. She had just enough time to suck in a lungfull of air before her face was pushed under the water.

Tanas held her breath. When her ears began to ring, she jerked the girl's head up. "Are you ready to call Beren?"

The girl remained defiant. "No," she spat.

Tanas promptly dunked her again, and held her under longer this time. Zenna came up coughing, but still adamant. Eyes slipping again and again to the chronometer, Tanas forced the girl's face into the basin another time, and still another.

"You're wasting—" the girl began the next time she was brought up for air, only to have the words cut off by the water. She fought once more to lift her head, and failed. A great shudder wracked her body.

Tanas felt surrender in that shudder. She pulled the girl up. "Yes?"

"Don't push me under again," the girl begged. "Please. Not again."

Tanas shoved her toward the intercom. "Call Beren. Get him here. Tell him you have to talk to him."

Zenna sucked in great gasps of air, then, nodding, she

pushed her dripping hair off her face with a shaking hand and reached for the activation switch. "Zenna to Nol Beren."

His answer came quickly, but impatiently. "What is it?" "I'm in section C-10, cabin 3-07," the girl said slowly. Then she finished in a rush, "Skay is with me."

Tanas clamped a hand over the girl's mouth. "Don't be in too much of a hurry to close in, Beren," she snapped. "I can be out of here in seconds and if I have to run, I'll leave a dead friend of yours behind."

There was a pause. "All right," Beren agreed. "What do you want me to do instead?"

"Release the officers."

Beren shouted with laughter. "Release the officers! Do you think I'm insane?"

"No," Tanas came back, "but if you think anything of your woman, consider what / can be." With deliberate care, Tanas slapped the girl.

Zenna screamed.

"Don't touch her," Beren snapped.

"I won't harm even a single hair if you surrender the officers to me."

There was an almost interminable pause. "I'll consider it."

"No, Nol!" the girl cried. "Don't do it! I'm not worth slavery."

As though he had not heard, Beren asked Tanas, "Would you consider letting us put you in lifeboats and land you on the nearest habitable planet?"

Did he think *she* was insane, Tanas wondered contemptuously. Aloud, she said, "I'm willing to negotiate . . . after the briefing room and bridge have been opened."

"That's good enough. Bring Zenna and meet us at the bridge."

"Nol!" the girl protested. "You can't." Tears ran down her cheeks.

"Zenna," Beren said sharply, "be quiet and do as I say. That's an order."

She subsided, shaking her head, her expression twisted by frustration and confusion.

Smiling triumphantly, Tanas drew her laser again and motioned the girl toward the door with a jerk of the barrel. Breathe gently down there, Captain, Tanas thought.

"I don't understand," Zenna muttered. "It isn't like him. We knew something like this might happen and agreed beforehand that . . ." Her voice trailed off.

Tanas's lip curled. "Plans are fine, but faced with reality you people are weak. You can't see beyond the immediate pain or rewards. How can you dare to hope to overthrow *Virinians*?" Inwardly she worried. Beren had broken, but was it in time? Would the bridge be opened soon enough?

As they reached the bridge, her anxiety increased. The group of crewmen there had pulled the bulkhead panel beside the door but had not tripped the mechanism yet.

She kept her face impassive, however. "I'll negotiate after the doors are open, Chief," she said coldly.

Beren, even stockier and ruddier than the girl, stepped forward out of the group smiling tightly. "I won't negotiate at all, Number One," he said. "The doors stay shut."

Tanas tightened her finger on the trigger of the exhausted laser. "The girl will die."

He leisurely pointed a laser of his own at her. "Perhaps. As she herself said, she isn't worth slavery. But I might point out that you'll die a second after she does."

Tanas's control almost slipped. She glared at him, barely holding back a choice selection of profanity. Vermin. If there had been the last charge left in the laser, she would have taken them all on, but . . . Grimacing, she tossed her laser at Beren.

He caught it, tossed it to a crewman who moved to take up a guard's position behind Tanas.

Zenna cried out in relief and threw herself into Beren's arms. He held her gently, stroking her hair and murmuring softly.

Tanas regarded them with contempt. "Now what?" she asked.

He looked up, smiled. "Now we open the bridge. Lal." A crewman reached into the controls. The bridge doors opened with a soft hiss.

"After you, Number One," Beren said.

Head high, Tanas strode onto the bridge. The air choked her but she would not back out.

"Tell engineering to reconnect life-supports and power," Beren ordered.

Tanas looked around angrily. The officers lay sprawled across the dark control panels, all at their stations. Only the command chair was out of position, swiveled to face the doors. Captain Keilit lay at its base, evidently having died patiently waiting for her, their only hope, to open the doors. Tanas clenched her jaws. The foul space scum, she swore silently. The filthy planet vermin.

She turned to fix Beren with glacial yellow eyes. "You'll all die, too," she said with satisfaction. "You don't know the recognition codes. Without those, you'll be destroyed by the first Coalition ship you meet."

Zenna frowned with concern but Beren did not even bother looking at Tanas. He was watching a medical assistant examine the bodies of the officers.

"Dead. Dead. This one, too," the M.A. was saying.

"We have the codes," Beren said. "After all, we have you."

Tanas sneered. "Don't expect me to give them to you."

"Power returning to the bridge, Beren," a voice said over the intercom.

Around the bridge the view screens and panels began flickering back to life. The silence was gradually replaced by the clicking and bleeping of normal operation.

Beren surveyed the boards, nodding with satisfaction, and slowly turned to face Tanas. "Whatever attitude you wish to take is fine. We have a fine medical staff and drug inventory here. We'll get what we need when we need it."

Tanas felt her blood congeal. Live a prisoner, her will controlled by drugs? Her heart began pounding. Live a slave to

these vermin? Her breath came hard. *Help* them escape retribution by the Coalition fleet?

"No," she spat. "Never."

And spinning, she launched herself across the bridge toward the weapons panel. The officers on the disabled bridge had not been able to use it, but now, thanks to the return of power, a final weapon was at her disposal. She reached with cold determination for the keyboard that activated the self-destruct device.

Someone guessed her objective. There was a burning pain in her back. Tanas clawed for the edge of the panel as she fell but missed. Her reaching fingers could not quite grasp the metal lip. She found herself on her face on the deck. She tried to scramble up. Her body refused to obey. She could not even lift her head. A scream of pure fury rose in her throat but no sound emerged.

The deck about her vibrated with footsteps and she felt herself being turned over. She felt hands on her wrists and chest. Beren's face swam over her, pale, wide-eyed, tight-lipped. The M.A. examining her must have made some negative sign because Beren went grey. He shifted his gaze to someone out of her limited field of vision.

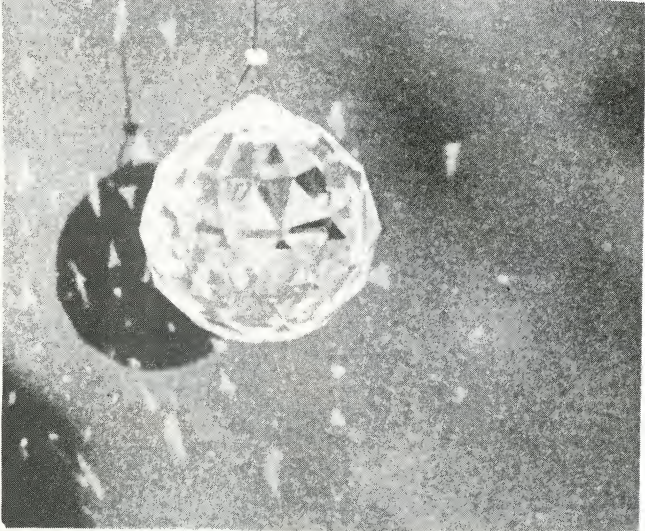
"Fool," he hissed. His voice reached her as though down a long, echoing tunnel. "You trigger-happy fool. It would have taken her a full minute to punch in the sequence. We could have tackled her."

Her fury faded. So did the pain in her back. All she felt was a creeping chill and vindictive satisfaction. She savored the despair in Beren's fading voice.

"Couldn't you even shoot to disable? We needed her for the codes. How are we going to get them now?"

A dark mist obscured the sight of his face but she could still hear his voice for a few moments longer, a far-away whisper that lingered yet a moment longer in dissolving memory.

"How are we going to get them now?" ■



Rainbow
Crystals
Trade
Winds
1652
N.High
294-2062



JOE HALDEMAN

Continued from page 45

coin and lived with the consequences — which other people have pointed out from the time of Aristarchus all the way up...

It's a long anthology. It's about 120,000 words. It's got some stories that... I think all of them are entertaining. I think some of them, kind of, have workable ideas in them. Most of them are exaggerations, you know, using science fiction as a... as a tool to tap-dance on war. Everybody knows war is bad, right? So it's an easy subject. It's a knockover. But, some good stuff. What I thought of as soon as I thought of the book was this Mack Reynolds story that was in ANALOG called "Frigid Fracas" about corporations having wars to make corporate decisions, rather than having wars between countries. So I wrote Mack and I got it. It had been retitled "Mercenary." And then I wrote to twenty people, or twenty-two people — I didn't throw the anthology open, I never told anybody except these twenty-two people I was doing it, and I said, I respect your minds and I think that you could handle this and give me something good. I would prefer to have reprints because I don't know how much money I'm going to have, but if you have an idea for an original story, write it and I'll meet the top rates, come hell or high water. And I got, I guess, twelve stories from these people, and I think they're good. I got two originals and I did meet, finally, I met ANALOG's rates three years after the fact.

S: Do you get a different kind of satisfaction from editing an anthology?

H: Yeah; it's not my bag, really, though. After two, I'm about ready to resign as an editor. It's more trouble than it's worth. I'd rather write the book myself. It was fun though. You know, you get that Santa Claus feeling when you send out money to all these people. And that's kind of nice. But, basically, the book is not your statement. It's a mélange of all these people's ideas. You don't have the feeling of responsibility, the investment that you have when you do the book yourself.

But, some people... like Damon Knight does it for a living. He edits books and he makes a lot of money at it, evidently. To me, it's not writing, it's administration. You know, the getting the idea, if it's a theme anthology, well, there's some creativity in that, but the rest of it, you're a secretary for all these people. You just make a book and you sell it. That's not fun for me.

S: Do you have any other plans for the future that we should know about?

H: Well, I don't know whether you care, but, yeah, I've got three more books outlined after the five are finished. One very serious novel, uh, serious in the... you know, they're going to give a rusty razor with each copy so you can open your veins when you finish it. It's a basic statement about the futility of life. No, I've got this thing mapped out fairly well. I don't want to talk about it because I'll kill it if I talk about it.

I've got one I'm planning for the far future called 1968. The basic idea is that you can't write a novel about Viet Nam independently of what was happening in the United States at the same time. So I'm going to write a novel with two viewpoint characters, one in Viet Nam and one in California. And the basic viewpoint character is a man who goes insane. He becomes paranoid-schizophrenic, and builds a fantasy world around himself while he is in Viet Nam and then he carries that viewpoint back to the United States. And it becomes a kind of flawed narrator science fiction story, that is, you don't know when he's telling the truth and you don't know when he's fantasizing. That's about all I know about the book, except that it's going to be very thick.

I've got to get the money. I'm going to take me two or three years to write this book. And I've got to have enough money to live on for two or three years before I can handle it. Well,

like the one I'm doing next, the next serious novel, CHARLIE'S WILL, I decided I wouldn't do it until I had enough money to live for a year, so that I could sit down and write it and not worry. And now I do. In fact, I'm doing it first as a screenplay, as an original screenplay. Because I've got a Hollywood agent, who tells me that original screenplays are more likely to be bought than sending a novel and saying, "Trust me! This would make a great movie." And, God, he's talking huge bucks for it. So, I'll just do the screenplay as kind of an outline for the novel and send that off to him and then sit down and write the novel. If anything happens, that's great. If nothing happens, that's great, too. And it would set me up, you know, for five, or even ten years, if he's honest about the amount of money... unless I "go Hollywood"... which is not likely.

S: We were wondering if you would like to do a self-portrait for our magazine.

H: Yeah, I could do that. Let me do it at home, and mail it to you. Because I'm like most Sunday painters, I have to have the right mood and condition.

That reminds me I'm doing the cover for my next book, ALL MY SINS REMEMBERED. It was funny how that happened. My last book, MINDBRIDGE, I sold on the basis of an outline, which I subsequently threw away, and the editor knew I'd thrown it away. And he lost the outline, then he had to get a cover made. So he wrote me, asking me to write the catalog copy for the book. So I wrote three paragraphs of catalog copy, sent it in, and he gave that to an artist and said, "Do a cover." And they sent me the rough, a pencil rough of it, beautiful job, totally inaccurate, had nothing to do with the book. So, I did an ink and wash thing and sent it back, saying, "Look, this is what they look like, and all that, and I love your artist, he's a great guy; but no, not that." And they came back with a counter offer for me to do the jacket on the next book. So, I will make my debut as a commercial artist, if I have the time. I don't know if I'll have the time to do this damn thing. I did about a dozen roughs for it, and I have the idea now... And I'm kind of getting away from... I wanted to do it in ink and wash, because that's where I'm the most comfortable... various colored inks... and now I think I ought to do it in egg tempera or oils. I don't know if I'll have the time to set it up, and you know, rehash these skills. I haven't used oil in four or five years, but it would be more appropriate for the design I have.

Well, it's no money, it's 250 bucks, but it'd be kind of a neat thing to put in these little biographical sketches, you know. "He is also a bad artist!"...

Are you out of questions? A few hours ago... wasting all that good tape. Well, you can record over it... Let me have your address and I'll send you a drawing. I haven't done a self-portrait in a long time. I like to draw naked women.

S: Well, if you can work one in...

AWARENESS Sharon Williams

oh god,
when I saw you in
that nightmare
the beetle
breaking out of the
bruise
on your
forehead
my screaming could be
heard for miles
echoing in the clumped
pillow
underneath my fists.

starwind

science fiction and fantasy

FEATURED IN THE NEXT ISSUE:

STARWIND INTERVIEWS HARLAN ELLISON: The acerbic, award-winning author discusses his perception of reality as a fantasy, his dislike for science fiction as a label, and his desire for freedom as an artist.

TO FILL THE STARRY ABYSS: Sergei Nagey had survived the greatest statesmen and scientists of the last millennium. What wisdom was his? Aman Kit had to know.

THE SHAPING OF DAY AND FLESH: This incisive analysis examines the impact of free will and predestination on Paul Atreides' role in Frank Herbert's *DUNE*.

BLUE MOON OF KENTOCKWEI: Colon the Chimera faces the forces of evil in a never-ending battle to the death in this outrageous parody of the de Camp-Carter novella, "Red Moon of Zembabwei".

THE SIREN GARDEN: Her husband thought she was childish. Michael thought she was lovely. Lee knew she was dangerous. Lorna was all of these... and more.

BACK ISSUES



Back issues are still available while the supply lasts. The first issue, *RUNE*, features an interview with Isaac Asimov, and the libretto for *H.M.S. TREKASTAR* by Karen Anderson.

The Spring 1976 issue of *STARWIND* includes "The Night" by Ray Bradbury, "Canal" by Carl Jacobi, an interview with Jack Williamson, plus analyses of Michael Moorcock and Robert E. Howard.



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BIODATA

AUTHORS AND ARTISTS

DAVE BISCHOFF will die on December 15, 2021, if he lives his biblically allotted three score years and ten. The last forty five years of this hypothetical period he intends to devote to trying to figure out the meaning of his first twenty five years, during which time he was born, made slightly neurotic by his parents, went to school, went to college, went to Europe, didn't get married, found a job at NBC Washington where he presently works. He still lives in the same general area in which he grew up. The single remarkable facet of Bischoff's life was his discovery of science fiction, and his successful transition from an SF fan to an SF writer. After over twenty five sales of his written work, he is still baffled at his good fortune, and intends to keep proving to himself that he can write.

TERRY BUCKINGHAM, a native of Columbus, is studying art at The Ohio State University. She hopes to graduate by the Spring of 1978. She enjoys reading and illustrating fantasy and science fiction and particularly likes JOHN CARTER OF MARS by Edgar Rice Burroughs.

MICHAEL JONES graduated from the Columbus College of Art and Design in June, 1974, where he majored in illustration. He is presently employed, full-time, as an assistant manager at a movie theater while accepting free-lance art assignments. Jones is hoping to direct feature films someday, concentrating on the fantasy or thriller (Hitchcock) type, while keeping his art career going, of course.

LEE KILLOUGH has been writing since childhood, though she started publishing only after she acquired a feline familiar named Merlyn and began sharing the name and living quarters of the man she describes as her best and most severe critic. She feels science fiction is a natural direction for her writing to take since she spends her days surrounded by non-human species taking charge of the x-ray department at the Kansas State University School of Veterinary Medicine.

ELBERT LINDSEY, JR. graduated from Ohio State University in 1974 and now works in Columbus. His spare time is devoted to reading and writing science fiction, working on STARWIND, and fantasizing about leaving Ohio. He is currently working on a nonfiction article entitled "Eliminating the Third and Fourth Drafts in Short Personal Correspondence."

GEORGIA K. MASE, having wasted her childhood and squandered her adolescence, is now devoting her energies to frittering away her adulthood. She is currently attending Ohio State University, where she hopes to obtain a degree of coherency. Her avowed goal is total control of the universe, but in the meantime she would settle for maintenance at the Prytaneum.

RICHARD McCABE was born and raised in Columbus and has not yet managed to escape. He is presently a senior in the Computer Science department at OSU, and is driven to write by the frustrations incurred from various electronic devices. This effectively sums up his life history to date as he is otherwise untraveled, unlettered, and uninteresting to talk with at parties.

LEE WEINSTEIN is a 28 year old biologist from Philadelphia, Pa. He received his master's degree from Villanova University in 1974 and is currently employed as an information analyst, abstracting current papers in cancer research. In addition to imaginative fiction, particularly of the Lovecraftian school, his interests include photography, bicycling, and travel.

SHARON WILLIAMS is a student majoring in English at The Ohio State University. She has studied with Robert Canzoneri and Hale Chatfield and has been published in STARWIND, the LANTERN, and elsewhere. She has been STARWIND's Poetry Editor for two years and is a former Assistant Editor. Williams became interested in science fiction at age nine, finding it a legal way to escape reality. She longs to see Middle Earth, but in the meantime survives by raising plants and supporting a suicidal hamster named Halfling.



FARFETCHED

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

DR. ROGER C. SCHLOBIN
Department of English
Purdue University
4 March 1976

Marshall Tymn of Eastern Michigan University and I are pleased to announce that we will publish an annual series, "The Year's Scholarship in Science Fiction and Fantasy." It will appear each December in *Extrapolation*. The first compilation will be for 1974. We would be most appreciative if you would announce this to the readers of *Starwind*. Please indicate that any off prints or information for inclusion in the bibliography can be sent to me. So far, the bibliography will be divided into the following sections: General, Bibliography and Reference, Teachers' Aids (including films and slide presentations), Authors, and Selected British Scholarships.

Since we will ultimately be revising Marshall's "Checklist of American Critical works on SF: 1972-73." *Extrapolation*, 17 (December 1975) and will be involved in this project for some time to come, we would also appreciate subscription and back issue information concerning *Starwind*. Although this is a scholarly project serving everyone interested in Science Fiction and Fantasy, we are working with a very limited budget (mostly our own), and your generosity would be much appreciated.

Many thanks for your help.

* * *

CARL JACOBI
30 March 1976

... I also received from you the copy of STARWIND with my story, CANAL. I must say that this is one of the best magazines of its kind I've seen in a long time with a truly outstanding cover illustration. In fact, it's the best cover on a fantasy publication in years. I'm glad to be included.

Address all correspondence to: FARFETCHED, The Starwind Press, Box 3346, Columbus, Ohio 43210.



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